

**“Dancing for the Culture”: An Exploration of Cultural and Communal Healing and Uplift  
through Multicultural Dance Education**

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**BUILDING THE BACKGROUND: Where's my narrative?**

As a Black girl trudging through a Eurocentric public-school education, from kindergarten to 12th grade, I was never truly engaged in the curriculum that was before me. I just went through the motions and turned in the schoolwork. I never challenged whether Christopher Columbus truly “found” America. I never thought about African Americans having *positive* histories beyond the overplayed narratives of slavery and civil rights oppression. I never realized that people of color were not being adequately represented in our lessons. No, I just trudged along, grade by grade, one Eurocentric textbook at a time.

When I entered college, however, I was exposed to what I did not even know I was missing: Latin American studies, Africana studies, East Asian studies, and more, were all at my disposal. I instantly became angered by seeing the histories and narratives I never had access to during the first *thirteen* years of my educational journey. I felt that my entire educational foundation was a lie. Exposure to these multicultural studies in college, to even the smallest ounces of multicultural knowledge, molded me into this greater being who not only had deeper pride in her own heritage, but also had a deeper love and appreciation for the cultures of those around me. Why did I have to wait until college to experience such wonders?

It is exceptionally important to note, however, that I do not wish to paint my college experience as a utopia of multiculturalism. Yes, I did have more exposure to diverse narratives, but the strong dominance of Eurocentrism in my college education was still the overwhelming truth and has actually turned into the inspiration for this project. In college, I realized very quickly that if I wanted to learn about Latin American art forms or African politics, I would have to actively seek those out in their respective “ethnic” educational departments. These topics would not be integrated equally into a “normal” Art History course or Political Science course.

This left me with more angering questions, “Why do I have to go out of the way to learn about myself and my peers as people of color?” ... “Why can’t these narratives be *deeply* explored *outside* of the Latin American and Africana Studies departments?” During my college career, the educational requirements would focus on European histories and contexts with rigor, depth, and intensity. Yet, other cultures and histories were often clumped together, and the information provided was brushed through with seemingly as little depth as intellectually possible. The academic requirements that I fulfilled over my four years may have had some multicultural frameworks here and there, but it was always clear to me that white narratives and contexts were esteemed above others. I noticed the tokenism effect within the school’s academic structure: an inclusion of a small amount of minority narratives is acceptable enough and leaves everyone satisfied.

Doug Risner and Susan Stinson speak extensively about tokenism in higher education, more specifically higher dance education, in their work “Moving Social Justice: Challenges, Fears, and Possibilities in Dance Education.” The authors state,

“Unfortunately, efforts to make post-secondary dance more multicultural have focused nearly exclusively on exposing students to non-Western forms and cultivating an appreciation of someone else’s cultural dance form. Though exposure and appreciation initiatives are important first steps, rarely do our programs adapt a multicultural perspective or integrate wider multicultural identities... we continue to think of western dance forms as “normal,” require these courses, and then conservatively sprinkle non-western dance forms and content like exotic condiments on the traditional western meal of meat and potatoes” (5).

These scholars explain beautifully that there is an important difference between *exposure* and *integration*. Surely it is wonderful to have students exposed to a variety of cultures, but how do we go about actually integrating those diverse cultures into the curriculum in a way that challenges the hierarchy of western ideals and uplifts students of color who have been pushed towards the margins of society?

My goal for this project is to eradicate the educational practices that kept me feeling deprioritized and forgotten as a student of color from kindergarten to college. I intend to use multicultural dance education as a tool to uplift and empower students of color who may also feel forgotten. I will also argue that multicultural dance education can be used to shape socially conscious and socially active communities that can change these degrading practices of dominant culture. Throughout the course of this paper, I will, first, set the framework for the project by explaining why this work is relevant and necessary, defining the key pedagogical terms of the project, and making a case for why dance is chosen as the specific medium for social change. Next, I will provide arguments for how multicultural dance education paired with each of the key terms, but particularly the term “social justice pedagogy,” can shape empowered students of color and create socially conscious communities. I will then share concrete examples of multicultural dance education through fieldwork data collected in four different New York City educational sites. The work will end with final reflections on the future of multicultural dance education, given the challenges and successes of the practice found in my fieldwork, along with an appendix of original sample lesson plans cultivated from and inspired by the research and fieldwork of this project. With this work, I have found that dance is not simply a creative form but an instrument for cultural understanding and empowerment alongside social healing and unity.

**Building the Problems: Why is this work relevant and necessary?**

The time for a more inclusive and diverse American educational system is now more than ever. The United States is the most racially diverse it has ever been, and yet, our country is maintaining devastating achievement gaps between white students and students of color, and it is presenting seemingly endless examples of prejudice and racism across the country.

One may argue that the dominance of Eurocentric narratives in American education is normal or makes sense because people of white or European descent are the majority in our country. And yet, this is becoming less and less of the reality. Demographic information from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that between 1990 and 2016, the Hispanic population in the United States more than doubled from 22.6 million to 57.8 million. The Black population increased by 37% from 29.4 million to 40.3 million, and the American Indian/Alaska Native population increased by 33% from 1.8 million to 2.4 million. Within the realm of school-aged children, ages 5-17, there were similar patterns. Between 2000 and 2016, the number of Hispanic, Asian, and mixed race children in the United States all increased. On the contrary, the percentage of white school-aged children in the U.S. decreased from 62 to 52 percent between the same time span (Musu-Gillette et. al., 2017). These statistics prove that our nation is moving from a predominately white demographic towards a much more diverse one. U.S. schools should, therefore, be reflecting that diversity in their curricula. This project will explain how multicultural dance education can be a framework for that increased diversity.

Another reason this work is relevant and necessary is the fact that our Eurocentric education system enforces an achievement gap and pushes a deficit lens on students of color. This means that racist and white supremacist ideals that present students of color as “less than” or

“underperforming” or “incompetent” against their white counterparts are *supported* and *reinforced* by the unjust and unequal curriculum.

We can look at standardized testing statistics to see that, unfortunately, the achievement gap between white students and students of color is a prominent reality across all of America. The National Center for Education Statistics provides examples. In 2015, Hispanic students in grade 12 scored an average 20 points lower than white students in reading. That same year, Black students in grade 12 scored 30 points lower than white students in reading, which was an even *larger* discrepancy than the 24 point gap between Black and white students back in 1994. 2015 statistics for mathematics showed similar discrepancies. In 8th grade, for example, the gap between white and Hispanic students was 22 and the gap between white and Black students was 32 (Musu-Gillette et. al., 2017.).

Students of color have countless odds against their academic success with obstacles such as higher levels of poverty and lower quality schools that attribute to the achievement gaps shown above. However, some scholars have attributed these inequalities to students of color not having the social and cultural affirmation needed to succeed academically. In her article “From Classmates to Inmates,” Elizabeth Cramer explains that lack of cultural representation can be directly linked to students of color underperforming academically and having educational and social conflicts that lead them through the school-to-prison-pipeline. She declares, “The nexus between dropout and prison is cultural marginalization... students are more likely to drop out when they do not feel they are part of the general culture of the school” (472). Cramer’s thoughts on school culture, in my opinion, can be interpreted as both the *academic* and *social* cultures of the school, both of which affect student performance. Even in a school that is populated by predominately students of color, students can still feel marginalized by curricula that do not

prioritize their cultures and/or by school cultures that do not support them socially or emotionally because of racial stigmas and racial deprioritization. Feeling culturally marginalized, as Cramer explains, only increases the amount of social and emotional obstacles they must face on a daily basis, making it exceptionally difficult to achieve in school.

These circumstances are made worse when the few times that students of color *do* see themselves in the curriculum, it is through a negative lens. Cramer also explains, “When communities of color and/or those with a disability status are discussed in the literature, as well as in schools, it is often from a deficit-based perspective and with a passive voice” (467). This idea of “deficit-based perspective” goes back to my accounts of only remembering learning about African Americans within the context of slavery and racial oppression in my school’s curriculum. The lack of curriculum that positively affirms the cultures of students of color can place the students, whether consciously or subconsciously, in this deficit mindset.

The idea of deficit is not exclusively presented in test scores and degrading curriculum, it is also presented in student-teacher interactions and classroom/school social and cultural practices. So often in American societal practices, stereotypes and negative histories are *forced* on students of color simply because of their racial, ethnic, or cultural identity. People of color are criminalized, hypersexualized, and trivialized in society, and these grand-scale problems slither right into day-to-day classroom happenings. In Jeff Duncan-Andrade’s student interviews, a student named Michelle explains her frustration in being subject to these stereotypes as a Black student in her high school,

“Yeah a lot of our teachers teach us about out here through their stereotypes. So, it’s hard for us to respect them because they lookin’ at it negatively and we lookin’ like well I live here and it’s not as bad as you think it is... I can’t honor the things that you’re saying



because number one you're down talkin' me and you're down talkin' my environment, which means you're basically disrespecting my whole history because everybody that I know has been living out here" (629)

As stated, Michelle feels *disrespected* by the projection of stereotypes from her teachers. It is degrading and discourages her from wanting to participate in class which can also lead to the achievement gaps displayed earlier.

Another example of how deficit stereotyping manifests itself in America's education system is student of color representation in special education programs. Donna Ford and Charles Russo explain that "no other group of children is as overreferred, overidentified, and overrepresented in special education as Black students, specifically Black males" (Ford and Russo 40). They are more likely than any other group to be diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, and developmental delay.

The issue is that these diagnoses often times come from racial stereotyping. Students are misdiagnosed and over-referred simply because of the color of their skin. They are pronounced as having learning disabilities when, in reality, the lack of academic resources and attention have caused them to fall behind - not lack of intellectual ability. These diagnoses violently push a deficit lens on Black youth in the K-12 education system and force many Black students to believe that they are inadequate, disadvantaged, and uncappable of educational success.

The final reason that a shift in education is needed is because a Eurocentric curriculum embodies and reinforces the roots of racism and prejudice in our country. Whether consciously or subconsciously, students and teachers are taught to value white narratives and degrade others. Textbooks are written in ways that display blatant bias towards Eurocentric modes of thinking. Curricula are developed to prioritize white authors, white history, white art. Multicultural lessons

are occasionally included but quickly brushed over. We must become critical of the way these choices encourage racist tendencies. If students in a World History course spends two weeks on the countries Britain and France and then only two days on the entire continent of Africa, which one will seem more important to them? Which history will they understand more broadly and intently? In order to eliminate such biases and racist practices, we must *equally* prioritize the marginalized narratives.

A multicultural curriculum can eliminate racism by *normalizing* diversity. Racism, stereotyping, xenophobia, and other harmful practices and ideals often times exist because people do not have deep enough understandings of those who are different from themselves. As students learn about the various cultures and histories that are represented in their classrooms and beyond, they are more likely to understand and respect cultural diversity as it shows up in their day-to-day lives. This sets the foundations for students to *challenge social norms*, as Risner and Stinson explain, and fight for social equality in their schools and communities (5).

### **BUILDING THE SOLUTION: How can multicultural dance education fix these problems?**

The continuous marginalization of students of color in the midst of increased cultural diversity, racialized achievement gaps, and deeply engrained practices of prejudice and racism are all more than enough reasons to demand change in our education system. The goal of this project is to explore an innovative and inclusive way to advocate for that change. I will fuse multicultural dance education with social justice pedagogy and other key pedagogical terms, in both theory and practice, to show how multicultural dance education can be used in K-12 schools to empower marginalized students of color as well as build strong, diverse, socially active communities.

## Building the Vocabulary: Key Pedagogical Terms

There are eight key terms that will be highlighted in this work: *marginalized students/students of color, multicultural dance education, social justice pedagogy, critical cultural consciousness, culturally relevant pedagogy, emancipatory education, dance as healing/dance therapy* and *kinesthetic empathy*. These eight terms may seem overwhelming to work with all at once; however, this project will demonstrate how each seamlessly contributes to the ultimate goal of creating more socioculturally just classrooms and communities. Because of this ultimate goal, I highlight “*social justice pedagogy*” as the most important key term that aids the successful impact of multicultural dance education. Each of the other key terms are further supporters of and gateways to socially just multicultural dance education. Below I will briefly define each of the key terms in order to set the foundation for their uses in this project.

While seemingly self-explanatory, it is important to clearly define “students of color” and “marginalized students” as I use them interchangeably throughout this work. I define “students of color” as children who have racial, ethnic, and/or cultural heritages that are not white or European in origin. I identify “marginalized students” as students whose identities are not represented and often times not respected in society to the extent that white or European identities, histories, and cultures are. Although these definitions differ, I consider the two terms to be interchangeable because, more often than not, in American societal practices, people of color *are* the marginalized. Educator Rebecca Powell defines marginalization in school settings specifically as situations in which “some students may feel alienated, ignored, or even degraded because of their cultural and/or socioeconomic backgrounds” (87). She explains further,

“It is a practice that tends to tell some students that they are not quite as significant as others, and hence they are “pushed to the margins” – they are forced to remain outside the

mainstream culture within the school. We marginalize students when we tell them (in subtle and not-so-subtle ways) that their cultural knowledge, language, and ways of "being in the world" are less important than ours" (87-88).

Because of these degrading practices, students of color - marginalized students - are the priority of this project. The work is meant to uplift them from the margins and prioritize their cultures first in schools, then in their communities, and beyond.

The next key term, *multicultural dance education* is the foundation of my project. Multicultural dance education is built from diversity and *equal* inclusion. It provides adequate space in the curriculum and the school community for multiple identities, narratives, and frameworks to be explored in the classroom, not just dominant ones. Risner and Stinson use Dr. Milton Bennet's "Model of Intercultural Sensitivity" to define multiculturalism itself: "Multiculturalism is a social and political movement and position that holds differences between individuals and groups to be a potential source of *strength* and *renewal* (emphasis mine) rather than of strife. It values the diverse perspectives people develop and maintain through varieties of experience and background stemming from racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation and/or class differences in our society" (Risner and Stinson 4). As Bennet's definition suggests, multiculturalism in education is much deeper than simply *presenting* diverse narratives, it requires that school communities present those narratives *and* actively investigate how to equalize and liberate those who have been marginalized.

The next term, *social justice pedagogy*, is, again, the leading key term of this project because it fully encompasses the leading goal of this project: to create more socioculturally just schools and communities. Social justice pedagogy can be defined as educational practices that encourage teachers and students to be activists for social equity in their schools, greater

communities, and beyond. It means critical, action-oriented education that challenges degrading and damaging social constructs as well as finds solutions to changing the negatives societal realities we face.

These words *critical* and *action-oriented* are important in my definition because social justice can only manifest through critical assessment of the problems followed by planned and executed actions against those problems. When discussing social justice dance education, Risner and Stinson share the fact that many educators understand the issues that marginalized students face but do not take action against those issues in effective ways. They state, “We triage those kids, but never think about the system that creates these circumstances. To think about the system creating the challenges so many young people face in schools, takes us beyond thinking about individual and cultural differences to thinking about broader issues of social justice. It means we try not just to help future teachers fit into the world as it is, but to create a world that is more just, more fair, as well as one that is more compassionate” (Risner and Stinson 3). These are the goals of social justice pedagogy that will be displayed in this project along with action-oriented methods of achieving said goals.

The remaining key pedagogical terms are all used to support the goal of socially just multicultural dance education. Next is *critical cultural consciousness* which is the practice of deeply analyzing and challenging societal constructs, such as systematic oppression and eurocentric cultural dominance. Critical cultural consciousness stems from the concept “critical consciousness” coined by the esteemed pedagogue and educational theorist Paulo Freire. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire discusses critical consciousness through the idea of “problem posing education.” He explains that problem posing education involves “critical reflection” of the societal structures we internalize. “One must engage in education in ways that

actively assess communication and one's position in and relationship to the world" (Freire 1972). Critical cultural consciousness invites students and teachers to engage with social issues on personal scales, global scales, and everything in between, to begin concretizing the problems they will "pose" as Freire would say and begin working towards solutions.

Once this critical lens is intact, the teacher and students can begin to assess the next key term, *culturally relevant pedagogy*, which involves being sensitive and responsive to the cultural representations in the school community. Critical cultural consciousness helps us to assess our positionality in the world. Culturally relevant pedagogy helps us to prioritize the positions of those who are marginalized. "Culturally relevant pedagogy" was introduced to the world of educational philosophy by Gloria Ladson Billings in the early 1990's. She explained, "Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (Ladson-Billings 160). All of these components of culturally relevant pedagogy work towards achieving social justice for students of color. With each of these three points, Ladson-Billings was using culturally relevant pedagogy to close the achievement gap, prioritize cultural awareness and pride in students of color (primarily African-American students in her studies), and encourage social change through use of Freire's critical consciousness.

In a case study on teacher quality, Duncan-Andrade interviewed a group of students on what was productive and what was not productive in their classroom spaces. Many of the students spoke about the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy in their statements. A student named John explained,

“I feel that teachers need to talk about more realistic things... you’ll be in a zone thinking about your own problems that’s happening out in the streets while they’re talking about some stuff that really doesn’t concern you. But when a teacher hops on your level then you can really open up, like dang, like get stuff off your chest. It might help solve problems that you’re going through” (Duncan-Andrade 629).

John’s experiences with his teachers shows that he valued having his own issues prioritized in a classroom space. Culturally relevant pedagogy can help students “solve problems that [they’re] going through,” as John stated, which, again, aids the key goal of social justice pedagogy.

*Emancipatory education* assists in creating a socially just classroom as well because it looks at education as a gateway to freedom for students of color that have experienced inequality and injustice. With emancipatory education, the classroom becomes a space where students are free to define themselves, free to express themselves, free to simply *be* themselves. Educational philosopher bell hooks discusses emancipatory education extensively in her writings. She states, “A goal of my work is to give students the tools to affirm themselves; define themselves for themselves” (hooks 18). A huge part of emancipatory education is that freedom to define oneself for oneself. Paulo Freire is also known for his support of “education as a practice of freedom” and “education as a humanist and liberating praxis” in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1972). He supported using education as a way to free students from being objects or subjects, and to eliminate societal roles of “oppressors” and “oppressed.”

*Dance as healing* is the next key term. I chose to use the word “healing” in the title of this project, because the central focus is providing release and uplift from the pain and frustration that marginalization causes students of color. In this project, I explore academic literature on the practice of *dance therapy* to communicate the argument of *dance as healing*. In *The Art and*

*Science of Dance Movement Therapy*, Sharon Chaiklin and Hilda Wengrower provide a relevant definition of dance therapy. She explains, “Dance/movement therapy... sees dance as naturally therapeutic due to its physical, emotional, and spiritual components. People share a sense of community while dancing... There is shared energy and strength when being with others. It enables us to go beyond our personal limitations or concerns. Within the joy of moving together, we also appreciate validation of our own worth and recognition of our personal struggles” (Chaiklin and Wengrower 5). Dance therapy gives students of color opportunities to accept, explore, and cope with the injustices and inequalities they face as marginalized people. The heaviness is no longer a buried burden. It can be unearthed and faced with the intent of planting new realities. This is a process of healing.

*Kinesthetic empathy* is the final key term. In *The Art and Science of Dance Movement Therapy*, “empathy”, excluding the kinesthetic aspect for now, is described as “the ability of one person to understand another. It attempts to experience somebody else’s inner life and implies knowing what the other one feels, having information about the other’s situation and acting accordingly” (Chaiklin and Wengrower 33-34). Adding “kinesthetic” to this means exploring and validating others’ experiences and emotions through bodily movement and bodily connections, which, in this project, will be through dancing. Multicultural dance education can serve as the medium for kinesthetic empathy to spark cultural empathy and understanding.

### **Building the Framework: Why Dance Education?**

I realize that many of the key terms above do not have to directly relate to dance in order to be effective in achieving equity in the classroom. For example, multiculturalism can be applied in a literature class, and social justice pedagogy can be used in a government class.



However, I would like to pinpoint why dance's ability to capture creative expression and cultural practices makes it exceptionally useful for this project, and why pairing these key pedagogical terms with dance *specifically* brings sociocultural justice to the classroom in an impactful way. I have three arguments in choosing dance for this project: a) dance and movement are already integrated into many children's lives through communal and social exposure; b) dance, as a *physical* art form, has shown the ability to help young children better understand concepts through kinesthetic and active learning; and c) the physical manifestation of dance within the body allows for deeper, more intimate understandings of culture.

Dance is so heavily integrated into American culture that one does not need formal dance training to understand the concepts of moving rhythmically and/or creatively. Most students will have some type of exposure to dance prior to class making it a more easily accessible and relatable discipline than other subjects for studying concepts such as equity and inclusion. Educators Susan Stinson and Terese Detnold write about this in an article on how dance can be used to build communication and healthy relationships between parents and their children. The women write, "Most adults have certain assumptions about what dance is, often related to a particular performing style. Actually, dance is not just ballet or rock and roll or the waltz, but any movement done for the sake of moving (rather than for a functional purpose) and performed with awareness and concentration... Babies begin to dance at the age of a few months when they bounce to music, delighting in their own rhythm" (Stinson and Detnold 49). A human being can successfully comprehend moving their body to the timing of a rhythm or beat before turning one year old! Dance is physically and socially internalized from such a young age, and that can be utilized in the classroom.

The way that dance is socially integrated into our lives makes it a natural representation of our other social and cultural experiences. This is particularly exciting when working with students of color because dance can represent the marginalized narratives that we, as educators, want to highlight and prioritize through dance education. Teachers can tailor multicultural dance lessons directly to information that is culturally relevant for their students which makes the students feel more valued and therefore become more intrigued and more engaged in the classroom. I have happily witnessed this with my own students of color. This past summer I worked as an educator in a summer literacy program teaching reading to fourth and fifth grade children in a predominately African American neighborhood. The lesson plans gave students the opportunity to creatively discuss and present the books that we would read each week in whatever ways they wished. With almost every single presentation, my students would use some capacity of dance and music in creating their work as they acted out scenes from the stories or gave summaries of the books.

Outside of the academics, my students were constantly dancing as well. Each day, at the beginning of our 15-minute snack-time break, I would hear my students, without fail, “Miss Armoni! Miss Armoni! Can we have a dance battle when we finish our snack!?” ... “Miss Armoni! Can you put on music, so we can dance!?” They would become ecstatic about the opportunity to dance during free time. This was their outlet, their bonding, and their happiness. With this work in multicultural dance education, I hope to capture that natural excitement about dance in marginalized students’ lives and use it towards uplifting and equalizing their narratives.

It is important to note that none of these students had any type of formal dance training. I taught in an impoverished neighborhood where many of the students could not even afford that luxury. And yet, from their social environments they still developed a natural love for the art.

From “Daddy-Daughter” dances and high school proms to family weddings and coming-of-age ceremonies, dance is already intrinsically imprinted in many children’s bodies. In chapter six of *Movement and Dance in Young Children’s Lives*, Adrienne Sansom interviews a student and asks him to share about learning dance in his community growing up. He responds to the interviewer, “Who taught me? Nobody taught me; I just listened and watched by being part of the scenery. There is no provision for that kind of learning anywhere” (Sansom 109). This student recalls naturally learning dance from simply being a “part of the scenery,” or interacting within is his community. This intrinsic familiarity with dance in not only our American society but in countless societies across the world makes it a discipline that many, if not all, students in a classroom have had access to, which creates an accessible, unanimous starting point for developing cultural empathy and equity.

To solidify this point of dance being easily accessible and culturally relevant, I look to one of my favorite quotes from Alvin Ailey, arguably one of the most influential African American choreographers of all time. Ailey’s vision for his work was to honor the *cultural roots* of dance. He states, “Dance is for everybody. I believe that the dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people” (Ailey). This quote relates to the interviewed student’s experience of learning dance by “being a part of the scenery.” Dance, for him, did not come from years and years of ballet studios or modern dance intensives. It came from spending time with his community, being with “the people.” Ailey’s quote reminds us that *behind* dance lies all the cultural experiences and practices of the people. For hundreds and hundreds of years dance has been a story teller. It communicates people’s thoughts, feelings, accomplishments, histories, political statements, social statuses, and more. This is what makes dance a powerful tool for digging up marginalized cultures in the classroom. It be used to help

students of color channel all of these communicated themes of their own heritage and the heritages of their peers.

Next, the highly physical nature of dance has proven to be an effective learning tool in the classroom. Many creative forms of culture may require physical activity, but dance is unique in that the body itself is the compass that guides you in learning and experiencing culture. You do not need a cook book, a paint brush, or a musical instrument; you just need your body, an instrument with which you are already intimately familiar through day-to-day movement. Use of the body is resourceful from a pedagogical standpoint because students process and understand information more clearly through active or physical learning. In a study that supports this view, John Ratey, associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, assessed that “the way we think, learn, and remember is directly influenced by our movements... to keep our brain at peak performance, our bodies need to work hard” (Furmanek 81). Research like Ratey’s has inspired teachers to incorporate creative movement into academic subjects to help students better understand concepts as well as remain engaged and active in the learning process.

Three researchers from University of California, Berkley, Andrew Begel, Daniel D. Garcia, and Steven A. Wolfman experimented with various ways of implementing movement-based curriculum, or “Kinesthetic Learning Activities (KLAs),” into academic subjects including computer science and math. After evaluating the use of creative movement in a computer science (CS) lesson, the writers reflected,

“These exercises fill an important niche in CS education – energizing students and employing learning styles rarely tapped by our instructional techniques. KLAs engage students by putting them in motion and sometimes even requiring real exertion, raising heart rates that tend to lag during lecture. KLAs also tap into what Piaget [Swiss 20<sup>th</sup>

century psychologist and epistemologist] termed “sensorimotor learning,” in which physical activity transforms into representative mental symbols” (Begel et al. 183).

The use of creative movement in this computer science class lead not only to “energizing” the students but to mentally solidifying content through the physicality of the lesson.

In another fascinating study on the use of dance in sixth-grade social studies classes, researchers discovered that “intervening” with dance lessons related to the content throughout the class can “help students to learn better, encouraging deeper exploration and active engagement with content knowledge” (Smith et. al 2016). The researchers had a control group that did not receive dance classes and an experimental group called the “intervention group” that received the dance classes. They tested the two groups post-class and the results showed that the intervention group “had significantly higher content knowledge than the control group, and qualitative student responses from the intervention group suggest extremely positive feelings toward experiences in the program” (Smith et. al 2016).

These examples above prove that kinesthetic learning can help students better engage with and understand material in the classroom. That concept applies more specifically to this project in that dance can help students gain deeper, more engaging understandings of culture. In a multicultural dance class, the actual embodiment of movements from a specific culture may resonate with a student more than a lecture-style history lesson, *or* it may be the perfect supplement to a lecture-style history lesson in order for the student to actually solidify, experience, and personalize the knowledge being absorbed.

Use of the body provides a more intimate exploration of understanding and valuing others. Dance ignites understanding in a deeper way than other art forms because of its physical nature; you can look at a painting or a play, you can hear music, but you can *feel* dance. You are

literally internalizing the struggles, traditions, beliefs, trials, and triumphs of someone else's culture through the movements which allows space for deeper senses of cultural understanding and cultural empathy.

### **BUILDING THE CONNECTIONS: How do Dance and the Key Terms Unite?**

Now that I have introduced some of the value and uniqueness of choosing dance specifically in this work, it is time to connect multicultural dance education to the other key pedagogical terms explained earlier and analyze how they can uplift students of color and begin healing and building communities. This explanation will be divided into two sections: "Building the Individual" and "Building the Community." The central lens of fusing multicultural dance education with social justice pedagogy to achieve these goals will fuel the conversation.

#### **Building the Individual: Cultural Affirmation for Students of Color**

Uplifting and empowering students of color, or "building the individual," is the first goal of this project. In this section, I use *culturally relevant pedagogy*, *emancipatory education*, and *critical cultural consciousness* as the three key terms that guide us towards building the individual and achieving socially-just multicultural dance education. I argue that culturally relevant pedagogy assists students of color in developing self-affirmation and self-understanding, that emancipatory education gives them tools to uplift and positively redefine themselves, and lastly, that critical cultural consciousness provides space to analyze their identities within sociocultural contexts that highlight the injustices and inequalities they face.

This all begins with students of color having the resources to develop self-understanding and self-affirmation. Bringing culturally relevant pedagogy to the dance curriculum is the

powerhouse for this development. Through culturally relevant dance pedagogy, students of color, who have suffered from the marginalization of their stories and their heritages, are finally able to see themselves reflected in what they learn. Furthermore, students who are *not* a part of marginalized groups are able to gain knowledge and respect for these marginalized cultures hopefully acting as allies again underrepresentation and marginalization. In her article “Culturally responsive dance pedagogy in the primary classroom,” Elizabeth Melchoir explains, “All students benefit from being in a culturally inclusive classroom. However, many students from non-dominant cultures are not free to be whom and what they are when they go to school... [With culturally relevant dance pedagogy,] creativity is honored, and students are allowed to be who and what they are” (Melchior 125). In an article about cultural projection and racial politics in arts education, Rachel Mason describes the *product* of multicultural dance education as “cultural reassurance” (Mason 39). This idea of cultural reassurance means students of color understand that their stories are important and worthy of studying in the classroom space and beyond it.

Juliet McMains shows the positive impact of culturally relevant dance pedagogy in the responses she gains from her Salsa dance students. In her article “Salsa Steps Toward Intercultural Education” she states, “Many Latino students have told me that they feel proud that their own cultural history is being validated through formal study in a university class. The hybridity of salsa, which evolved through the merging of multiple cultural streams (African, Spanish, Caribbean, Puerto Rican, Cuban, African American, Mexican, Venezuelan, Columbian) that can all lay claim to salsa as ‘our music,’ means that students from many different ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds are able to feel a personal connection to the form” (McMains 29). What McMains shares here is a wonderful display of multicultural dance education, and

specifically culturally relevant dance pedagogy. Her students are able to “lay claim” to the dance curriculum through their personal heritages. This makes the curriculum “relevant” to their lives and initiates a sense of pride and ownership in their learning process. McMains’ educational methods here are notably unique in that she is actually not making an argument for *multicultural* education as much as she is *intercultural* education. The distinction is profound. While she does highlight the importance of helping each student to feel culturally identified in classroom, she is also explaining how she uses Salsa dance to help students gain cultural *unity* as well. This dance style shows students how many cultures can fuse together into one art form. Students from various backgrounds being able to “lay claim” to one dance brings them together through cultural pride in McMains class. This practice of “intercultural” education is something I aim to explore more deeply in future work focused on creating alliances and unity amongst marginalized groups.

Having a deeper understanding of self helps students of color through the process of developing self-affirmation. Self-understanding within this context is knowledge of one’s cultural history or heritage. I have spoken to many marginalized students who have reflected on how their cultural identities and educational experiences overlap and have then become ashamed and saddened that they do not have adequate knowledge of their own histories. One of my colleagues identifies as Asian American, and she shared with me a time when one of her white peers knew more about the history of her Asian ancestry during a class than she did. He was informing her about her own story, and it shamed her.

Culturally relevant dance education can be used as a medium for helping students of color like my colleague prioritize learning about their histories and gaining deeper self-understanding. Dance has been used historically as forms of protest, revolt, celebration, and so



on; therefore, multicultural dance education can be used to broadcast these historical narratives. An example is having a series of multicultural dance lessons in capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian dance form developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by enslaved Africans as a method of protection and defense against slave masters. This dance form provides the perfect context for students to learn about the countless parts of history that are connected to this movement: the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Portuguese colonization, slave revolts, and more. Seeing how dance served as a form of revolt and resistance against power can give students of this cultural background historical context of their people's oppression and political activism. The class could also take the time to see how capoeira has evolved as an art form over the centuries and what role it plays in Brazilian culture today. A cultural dance exploration such as this can put students one step closer to feeling that they know their heritage and have deeper connections to their cultural history.

As exemplified in with capoeira, the historical and cultural contexts behind some of these dances can be mentally and emotionally heavy as students are assessing histories of oppression, slavery, revolt, and more. To combat that heaviness and still look towards the goal of socially-just dance education, the multicultural dance classroom can be used as an emancipatory space for students of color. This involves using dance to give students freedom *from* oppression and freedom *to* take ownership of their sociocultural identities. Students start becoming change agents in this part of multicultural dance education. They take what they have learned, analyzed, experienced, and felt to creatively, express a *new* narrative for themselves and broadcast it for others to listen. A key question that drives my motivation for this research is *how can a multicultural dance classroom be a healing space for students of color?* Emancipatory dance education is part of the answer. Adrienne Sansom shares, "Education is about healing and

wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life. It is about finding and claiming ourselves and our place in the world (Sansom 139).

Combining multicultural dance with emancipatory education provides an avenue for dismantling the negative and manifesting the positive. Sansom also explains, “From a bodily perspective, delving into who we are humanly via dance enables the body to reveal those structures of oppression and injustice, which are etched into the body memory” (142). In a multicultural dance classroom, this involves developing space in the curriculum for students to use their own choreography to shed the narratives that suppress and oppress them and create new ones showing pride in their cultures, communities, and personal lives. With dance at the forefront, that could mean a choreography lab in which students showcase dances that represent positive images of community and growth such as those represented in West African coming-of-age ceremonies. It could also mean students developing interpretive dances that represent them shedding the stereotypes and oppression they have carried and expressing the sociocultural narratives they want to highlight. Giving students space for expressing themselves and advocating for themselves through multicultural dance education could be, at the least, an introduction to students of color seeing themselves in a more positive light and encouraging others to do the same. Duncan-Andrade shares evidence of this in an interview with an African American South Los Angeles high school student:

“In class we were bonded because we all gave each other a chance to humanize ourselves and let us know each other’s stories. We were bonded after that we looked at each other different. When somebody looks at me, they say, ‘oh he’s a gang-banger’. But, after I told my narrative, I humanized myself and they looked at me like, ‘oh, he’s more than a gang-banger. Yeah, ‘cuz smart on hood, but he’s smart.’ They stopped looking at me as

just a gang-banger and they started looking at me as a smart Black man. Which is how I always wanted you to look at me. I don't want you to acknowledge me as a gang-banger, which happened. I want you to acknowledge me as Darnell" (Duncan-Andrade 634).

Darnell clearly values the opportunity to "humanize" himself. Through emancipatory education he had the freedom to create a new narrative for himself. Educator Rachel Mason refers to her students of color as "cultural change agents" because they have the power to eliminate social and cultural hierarchies and injustices (Mason 39). Students of color can showcase the beauty and richness of their cultures through dance and bring forth the positive narratives that have been marginalized by dominant culture, creating social change. For example, in a classroom where the teacher is negatively racially stereotyping, exposure to a positive and uplifting view of a marginalized student from the student's *own* perspective can perhaps make a teacher think twice before pushing deficit and negative stereotypes on the *next* student of color they interact with or can encourage the teacher to be more of an advocate for uplifting student of color narratives.

Once students have developed an understanding of who they are and have determined how they want to define and redefine themselves, they can broaden their contexts from personal viewpoints to communal and societal ones. This practice involves the key term *critical cultural consciousness* and works towards our goal of social justice. Looking back at the example of Capoeira, students can practice critical cultural consciousness by studying how and why this dance was a form of political resistance. The students can study how Brazilians interacted with and reacted to Europeans and colonialism and what effects all of this that had on their national and cultural identities. They can then begin looking at even broader pictures of colonization and oppression and the affects that they have on other cultures and even our own country. Dance instantaneously becomes more than just movement. It becomes a way for students to look

critically at the world around them. They can use the example of capoeira to assess how that history applies to other nations, races, and cultures, and how similar stories of creative resistance may be present in their own nation or even their own community. The way Sansom views the ideal multicultural dance classroom is reflective of critical cultural consciousness practices. She explains, “I envisage a curriculum that will allow children to locate themselves critically within their own ancestral histories and memories” (Sansom 110). Locating oneself “critically” means not simply learning the cultural history but analyzing it and placing it in various social justice-based contexts.

### **Building the Community: Cultural Understanding, Cultural Empathy, and Activism**

In the analysis of community building through multicultural dance education, I have chosen four avenues that I believe equally contribute to the successful healing and strengthening of communities: collective responsibility, collaborative learning, kinesthetic empathy, and parent/community member involvement. With social justice as the continued focal point, I will quickly address each of the four pathways to community building dance education. I value a term used by Adrienne Sansom, “pedagogy of coalition” (104). This offers an image of teaching and learning with alliances and support at the forefront. The goal of this type of education is to share and build knowledge collectively with everyone’s best interests constantly being evaluated and incorporated into the learning process. This is the perfect framework to use when developing multicultural dance curriculum and ensuring that all stakeholders – teachers, students, parents, etc. – gain the most out of the educational experiences.

The first aspect of community building that is exceptionally valuable is the idea of everyone in the classroom, teachers and students alike, being held responsible for the learning

process *and* responsible for each other. All individuals are learning. All individuals are teaching. All individuals are supporting each other. Gloria Ladson Billings explains that teachers must “encourage a *community* (emphasis added) of learners; and encourage students to learn collaboratively, expect them to teach each other and take responsibility for each other” (Ladson Billings 61-70). When students feel the obligation to carry and uplift each other, teach and learn from one another, social justice is manifested in the classroom because all students want to see their peers succeed and will find ways to problem solve until everyone *does* succeed. In Duncan-Andrade’s work, he explains the way a teacher, Mr. Veracruz, creates that culture of responsibility in his class. Mr. Veracruz provides “normalized attention to historical and persistent suffering and injustices in the lives of his students, the community, and other communities locally and around the world. Beyond that, it built a culture of responsibility whereby students were prepared to understand that their education was training them to respond to injustice” (626).

In a multicultural dance classroom, collective responsibility can be implemented by explaining and exemplifying the importance of valuing and supporting the cultures of one’s peers through each and every dance lesson. Classroom efforts such as “dance community guidelines” can be written up with contributions and agreements from everyone in the class on how cultures will be acknowledged and respected in the space. Collective responsibility can also be enforced by giving students power over choices in the dance curriculum. This implies that they are to be held accountable for how the classroom is managed as well, not just the teacher, and that they can have agency in making choices that are important and engaging for them based on their cultural values.

The ultimate goal of this is to expand the practice of collective responsibility beyond the classroom. Collective responsibility meets social justice pedagogy when teachers encourage students to take responsibility of communal and societal issues with their education. Sansom states, “Personal engagement enables the creators of curriculum (teachers and learners) to make the learning their own. When there is recognition of ownership, there is a form of liberation, which comes with the understanding that one can affect change” (Sansom 138). When students and teachers all feel responsible for the work and each other, they are more likely to feel responsible to take what they are learning and experiencing to make social change in their communities.

Collaborative learning goes hand-in-hand with collective responsibility to build community. This involves dismantling the traditional power constructs we set in the classroom of teacher as the leader and students as the followers. Using collaborative learning in a multicultural dance classroom means that the children become teachers as well. Sansom invites us to remember, “Children do not enter the realms of early childhood or classrooms as blank slates onto which to etch knowledge, values, and beliefs. They come equipped with incredible achievements and qualities that should be cherished and expanded upon rather than subsumed into a hegemonic culture based on normative standards and restrictive views of what constitutes education” (Sansom 96).

Collaborative learning gives students of color opportunities to showcase their marginalized cultures and be acknowledged and understood by their peers. It also invites all students to listen to and respect their peers just as much as they would their teacher which is also powerful. Within the context of multicultural dance education specifically, Sansom explains, “The reinstatement of the multitude of different voices in the learning process, coupled with the

engagement of the body, which incorporates students' lived experiences" brings cultural understanding and respect into the classroom space (Sansom 103). Collaborative learning in multicultural dance education could involve having students work together in small groups to create pieces of culturally-relevant choreography that display important or valued aspects of each of the cultures represented in the groups. This collaborative learning process would encourage students to learn about each other, highlight similarities and differences, and bond through the creative process. All of this helps to foster a stronger classroom community.

Kinesthetic empathy is another powerful way to build community. To review, kinesthetic empathy is the ability to understand and care about someone else's feelings and experiences through bodily or physical interactions. Being able to literally experience someone else's culture inside your own body through dance can manifest such a deep, beautiful connection and understanding of others and build greater appreciation for both unity and diversity in a multicultural space. I have repeatedly referred to multicultural dance education as *healing* for students of color and diverse communities. Through this idea of healing, I have decided to study what scholars and psychologists in Dance Movement Therapy have researched on the effects of achieving kinesthetic empathy through dance. The book *Art and Science and Dance Movement Therapy* speaks extensively about the power behind kinesthetic empathy as a community builder. The authors actually establish "community" as a key component in the *definition* of dance movement therapy,

"People share a sense of community while dancing... Dance/movement therapy is based on the fundamental realization that, through dance, individuals both relate to the community they are part of on a large or smaller scale and are simultaneously able to express their own impulses and needs within that group. There is shared energy and

strength when being with others... It enables us to go beyond our personal limitations or concerns. Within the joy of moving together, we also appreciate validation of our own worth and recognition of our personal struggles... People need to feel integrated within themselves and be a part of a community. The use of dance is one way to enable that to happen.” (Chaiklin and Wengrower 5-10).

From this definition, we see that dance is therapeutic – healing - when a community shares and moves together, listening to and acknowledging one another through the body. This practice obviously intertwines with both terms mentioned above, collective responsibility and collaborative learning, because everyone must trust, respect, share, and be vulnerable with each other. Kinesthetic empathy can be practiced in a multicultural dance classroom through mirroring, an exercise that is commonly used in Dance Movement Therapy. Variations of the exercise are mentioned from research throughout this project as well. Chaiklin and Wengrower describe mirroring as a way of “resonating” with other people’s stories through dance which enforces our goals of culturally empathizing and building community. The authors explain the process and goals of mirroring in a dance/movement group therapy session,

“Mirroring and resonating, both faces of the same coin, the first externally oriented and the second inner directed, are implemented during movement sessions as main tools of deeply understanding others’ experience. Through movement and dance, perception, understanding, and intervention, dance therapists are able to relate to both inner and outer worlds. They understand that empathy enables intimacy and human closeness. The process involves elements that are common in the experiences of both individuals so that recognition of differences is therefore tolerable” (Chaiklin and Wengrower 4343)



The goal of kinesthetic empathy in multicultural dance education, through exercises like mirroring, is to create a kind of understanding and compassion that makes students of varying backgrounds advocates for each other in creating a more socially accepting and equal community. In another section of the South Los Angeles student interview, Darnell expresses the impact of empathy in his classroom, “He [the teacher] helped us humanize each other, and that’s how it was. It was beautiful just knowing that my classmate that’s sitting right next to me is fighting the same fight that I’m fighting. So, I got his back” (Duncan-Andrade 634). Darnell’s testimony suggests the goal of being an advocate for one’s peers. He states, “So, I got his back” meaning that he is willing and ready to support his fellow student. This is a goal of using kinesthetic empathy in a multicultural dance classroom; the physical embodiment of another’s culture through dance is building community and creating spaces for collective responsibility.

The last key component of community building is parental and community involvement. This is important in any child’s education, but to truly uplift marginalized students, it sometimes takes a lot more than just the teachers. One beautiful example of parental and communal involvement, specifically within the context of multicultural dance education, is Ifetayo Cultural School of the Arts in Brooklyn, NY. The founder of Ifetayo, Kwayera Archer-Cunningham, has a great academic article explaining how the school community is intentional about incorporating the *larger* Brooklyn community in everything the children do. She states, “What distinguishes Ifetayo from many organizations that provide comprehensive community development services is a central focus on the holistic nurturing of members through the arts, the insistence on family and community inclusion and support.” She shares that a goal of Ifetayo’s work is to use the arts as “a domain where a community achieves experiential and philosophical cohesion” (34-35). Because of these visions for Ifetayo, the school community is exceptionally intentional about

bringing parents and broader community members into the educational space, asking them what they need and want to see in their children's lives and in their community spaces. "We offer what the community asks for and do not just furnish what we think they need," Archer -Cunningham states (28). This goes back to culturally relevant pedagogy. It is important to listen to students *and* parents and community members to understand the identities, experiences, wants, and needs expressed in the community. Ifetayo takes what the community speaks about and prioritizes that in parent-teacher meetings, parent workshops, and other avenues. This involvement of parents and community members in the students' education is a key factor in bringing the community "cohesion" that Archer-Cunningham speaks of and that multicultural dance education strives to build. I had the great honor of completing fieldwork at Ifetayo for the research purposes of this project; so, a more detailed and personalized account of what Ifetayo has to offer will come later in this work.

### **BUILDING THE MODEL: What does multicultural dance education look like?**

The academic research on multicultural dance education and its complimenting key pedagogical frameworks lead me to pursuing hours upon hours of education fieldwork to gain tangible knowledge and experience with all of the philosophical and theoretical content above. From my experiences at four field sites, I will walk through the successes and challenges of multicultural education I have witnessed as I both observed and taught it in a variety of school settings across New York City. After analysis of this fieldwork, I will share a set of sample lesson plans that I believe encompass what a socially just multicultural dance classroom can look like. I highly stress through the presentation of both the fieldwork and the sample lesson plans that there is not such thing as a perfect mold for this work. Concepts such as culturally relevant

pedagogy and social justice pedagogy are constantly fluid and changing based on the identities and narratives and needs represented in the groups of students and communities being served. I only hope to provide content as a starting or reference point for what could benefit marginalized students and diverse communities.

### **Fieldwork Site One: Teaching with Movement Exchange**

Through the first fieldwork site, I had the opportunity to teach community building dance to elementary school students at a public school in Harlem, NY. I volunteered with an education-based community service organization called Movement Exchange that partners with schools and other community organizations to bring dance to students who are underprivileged. With this particular dance service partnership in Harlem, I was tasked with teaching community service and conflict resolution through dance. While community building was the main theme of my lesson plans, I was also able to incorporate cultural awareness and cultural appreciation into the dance/movement activities as well. This teaching opportunity became a great example of how to build the concepts studied in the theoretical portion of this project, including cultural affirmation, kinesthetic empathy, and community building, through dance. It also presented some challenges and questions that need to be addressed when thinking about the application of multicultural dance education in the classroom which is exceptionally helpful in thinking about the next steps of developing the pedagogical framework and practices.

In what follows, I review of two dance lessons: the first taught to fifth grade students with cultural community building as the theme and the second taught to second grade students with cultural empathy as the theme. I will give a chronological walk through of each part of the lesson and explain what role each part served in achieving the goals of this project.

With both the second and fifth graders, I first had my students complete what I call a “Concentration Clap Out”. They were required to sit in a circle and “pass” a singular clap around the entire circle. The catch was that the clap could not be passed until the students clapped at the exact same time as the person next to them. Once a unified clap was produced between two people, it could then be passed to the next person in the circle. This activity requires eye contact, focus, and team work, all of which are tools for getting the students engaged and ready for working collaboratively during the lesson. Depending on the age group and how well the students took to the concentration clap out, I sometimes invited them to try passing the clap around the circle and second or third time but even faster than the last. This increases focus and engagement even further as students are excited by the speed and anticipating when the clap will get to them while still using concentration, eye contact, and team building skills. After the concentration clap out, the fifth grade class dove into cultural community building. We first had a class discussion on the definition of community building and its importance followed by a quick warm up and finally a combination of group sharing and creative, team-building dance activities.

My lessons with Movement Exchange always started with a question. Rather than just blatantly state what the lesson would include, I wanted to see what the students already knew about a topic and, in the spirit of culturally relevant pedagogy, how they already perceive the lesson to be related to their daily lives. This informed my pedagogy and allowed me to better serve the students by listening to the way *they* perceive the content at hand. To start off this class period, I asked the students what their definitions of community were and what areas of their lives exemplify community. As I called on a few volunteering hands to share, I discovered that places with family and friends seemed to be the overarching visions of what community meant

for the students. As we dove deeper into the curriculum for the day, I knew that I could return to the definitions of community that the students produced *themselves* to produce clearer understandings of what we were learning.

After our quick introductory discussion, still in our clap out circle, we spread out to prepare for our warm up. Before starting, I asked the students which parts of their bodies need to be warmed up in order to for us to start dancing safely and not hurt ourselves. This is such a small, yet significant, way of actively incorporating students in the learning process to foster that collective responsibility and collaborative learning mentioned above. Rather than just leading the warm-up, I am asking the students to take initiative in thinking critically about their *own* bodies and warming up the parts of the body that they choose. After I lead the first few warm up moves, I choose a few students to lead the class with their own set of warm up moves as well. This is, again, aiding the idea of students and teachers making equal contributions in the classroom and creating space for the students to feel responsible for classroom happenings.

Once our bodies are filled with warmth, we moved back into a circle for the first dance exercise. I ask the students to think of their favorite style of dance that represents their cultural and/or communal background and share with the class if they felt comfortable. The students who volunteered to share with the class had to state the dance style, explain why it was their favorite, and present a dance move from that style for the class to mirror back to them. A pattern I noticed with the students' explanations of *why* they valued the dances was that they would mention doing these dances with their families, a parallel to the definitions of community itself from the beginning of class. One student valued the dance move he showed, a one-two step that resembled a hustle, because his mother taught it to him and he enjoyed learning dances that his mom did when she was his age.

It was fulfilling to have students mirror the dance moves after each classmate shared as an active practice of kinesthetic empathy. The students had to internalize the cultural practices that their peers valued. They were given the opportunity to not only hear about the dances but actually feel what movements brought their classmates joy. The students were smiling and giggling while they shared and danced; it was safe to assume that they were having fun engaging with one another. Not only is this an opportunity for kinesthetic empathy, but it is also another opportunity for collaborative learning. Through these moments of sharing, the students may have been exposing their classmates to dance forms that they had never seen or danced before. The students are therefore gaining opportunities to teach and learn from each other in a system that breaks away from the teacher merely depositing information into the students' minds.

Our next activity was called the "Rhythm Build." The students were broken up into small groups and had to use their bodies to create a rhythmic song with the peers in their group using their bodies as the instruments. The goal of the activity is for the students to go around the circle and have each student add to the rhythm one bit at a time. They start off with something rhythmically simple, and as each student adds on, it becomes an intricate song. This task is challenging not only because the students must use their bodies in creative ways to make sound, but also because they must effectively work together to make something that sounds artistically or musically successful to them. My students had such fun with this project. I was excited to see them tackle it with such enthusiasm and to have each of the six groups of children successfully complete the task.

What was even more exciting was the follow up discussion. I asked the students to share with me why this exercise represented community building. Each of the students who volunteered to respond understood the objectives and metaphors of the exercise quite clearly.

One student explained, “We had to learn to work together as a group and create one thing all together, but we also had to respect everybody’s individual difference and creative piece.” This was the exact message that I wanted to be communicated to the students. Community building, specifically in the context of cultural awareness and inclusion, involves making a healthy, unified community but also acknowledging cultural diversity and differences.

We ended the class with a cool down that involved calming movements and taking a few final collective breaths. It is my goal as an educator to always have classes begin and end in a unified state. This was especially important in the context of community building to solidify ideals of a collective and collaborative energy.

The second-grade class was not quite as much of a utopia as the fifth grade class was. The students were not as receptive or understanding of the material, and the dance activities were chaotic and less productive. Nevertheless, I was excited for this road bump; life would be less interesting if everything was perfect. Problems in the actual execution of these multicultural dance education theories is productive because it makes space for reassessing the practice, discovering disconnects and setbacks, and asking how things can be made more effective.

As a reminder, the second-grade class had a different focusing theme because we were on different units of curriculum in each of the classes during these times of fieldwork. While the fifth-grade lesson was centered on *cultural community building*, the second-grade classroom was focused on *cultural empathy*. A major challenge that I faced with the second-grade class is that I could not present the concepts in a way that was easy for the students to understand. The big question from this road block is *how do educators take these loaded, complex concepts like “kinesthetic empathy” and “cultural awareness” and make them comprehensible and applicable to the lives of small children?*

We began the second-grade class just as we began the fifth-grade class, with an introductory question to start a discussion on the topic at hand. I asked the students for the definition of empathy. None of the students knew what the term meant; so, I tried to break it down by giving examples: “Imagine that someone took your best friend’s piece of candy right as they were going to eat it. How do you think they would feel?... Even though no one took *your* piece of candy you can still relate to how your best friend feels about their piece of candy being stolen from them. This is empathy.” Once I felt that the students had enough examples, we moved into the concentration clap out which was also successful in this class for focus and team building. We then moved to warming up our bodies for the dance class ahead. I used the same method of starting the warm-up process then allowing five students to choose their own warm up moves and have the class follow.

The first empathy-based dance activity was called a dance train. I pre-selected a different set of five students to take turns being the head of a class “train” that was made by all of us lining up in a curvy strand throughout the classroom. Once the music began, each leader had a short amount of time to guide the class in whatever movements they wanted. The entire class had to reciprocate those movements as our class train turned and weaved its way around the space. This gave students the opportunity to pay keen attention to their peers, which would build cooperativeness and unity as they joined together in collaborative movement.

Next, we conducted our own variation of the mirroring exercise mentioned earlier from *The Art and Science of Dance and Movement Therapy*. Again, kinesthetic empathy is the theme and prevailing goal of mirroring exercises; it was, therefore, perfect to introduce to the second graders given the dance lesson’s topic of cultural empathy. The students were paired off and asked to choose who would be partner “A” and who would be partner “B.” Some of the adult



volunteers in the room with me paired with kids as well. This was productive not only for showing the kids that we were collaboratively learning, but also to give some of the students perspectives that varied from only peers their age. I would call out a specific feeling or emotion to the group and then press “play” on the music for partner “A” to begin interpretatively dancing the feeling — excited, angry, sad, worried, etc. — to their partner “B” for them to mirror it back as they went along. We would then switch roles for partner “B” to communicate their own interpretations of declared emotion through dance. Mirroring is a resourceful tool in a space meant for sharing and respecting culture because it tells those who are sharing “you have our attention” and “we acknowledge you” by reflecting what is communicated through dance right back to them. This assists the social justice goals of this project because simply being acknowledged can be the first step in helping marginalized students feel safe and validated.

If I had a class of students that were older than my second grade little ones, the mirroring exercise would have been more advanced in nature. The students would have been asked to communicate a time when they felt silenced or a time when they felt disrespected to their partner through interpretive dance. This would have been followed by a group discussion on how being silenced or disrespected made them feel, affected their future actions and experiences, and finally how their smaller, personalized experiences related to larger themes of racial and cultural marginalization. Kinesthetic empathy, feeling and valuing another person’s experiences through the body, then becomes social justice pedagogy, analyzing broader issues of injustice. Close-to-home examples of empathizing with peers become opportunities for deeper understanding of societal issues.

The final activity of the class was another cultural dance share-out. Since these students were a little younger than my fifth graders, instead of a focus on culture during the prompt, I

asked them instead to share a dance that came from their time with their family, friends, and community. What dances did they do at weddings and birthday parties? Approximately ten students were chosen to share and the class followed each of them in executing their dance moves. A few students did not know the names of the dances they shared but were able to explain where and with whom they did these dances (i.e. with their mother at a family birthday party). Through the cultural dance share out we saw a lot of moves that resembles salsa, hip hop and house dancing. Again, students were presented with the opportunity to teach and learn cultural dances that they and their peers may have never been exposed to otherwise, and students of color that may have felt deprioritized or ignored in school had a chance to share something they valued and be acknowledged in the space.

While there were definitely some valuable moments in this second-grade class, I felt that it was less fruitful than the fifth grade class because I was not able to truly communicate the ideals of empathy in a way that they understood. I attribute some of that to my lesson planning not being appropriate for the age group. Serious consideration needs to be given to how teachers can best communicate multiculturalism and cultural awareness to *very* young children. Many questions come up with this teaching experience that I do not yet have answers to: *How do you draw lines of what is age-appropriate to teach in the context of tough issues like racism, social inequality, cultural appropriation? What are the most effective ways to help young students understand concepts of cultural awareness, empathy, social justice? How do we simplify cultural lessons to help young students understand without disrespecting or disregarding important complexities?*

In regard to lesson planning, there were some classroom management decisions that could have helped the students get more out of the activity. For example, with the mirroring

activity, I had the students all working with their peers at once which made the room quite chaotic with movement and chatter. Students were sometimes distracted by the group going next to them or did not have enough space to move in the ways that they wanted with everyone dancing all at once. A change that I could have made was perhaps allowing three pairs at a time to go while the others sat and observed their mirroring sessions. This would have not only reduced chaos and allowed students to focus and have more space, but it also would have given students the opportunity to view the emotional communication of *multiple* peers not just their mirroring partner, adding more diversity to the perspectives gained.

### **Fieldwork Site Two: Participant-Observations with SLMD Teaching Residency at the Brearley School**

I had the amazing opportunity to be a participant-observer of multicultural dance classes by serving as an intern with Sydnie L. Mosley Dances (SLMD), a New York City dance company that focuses on socially conscious performance, activism, and arts education across NYC. I served as a teaching assistant at two of SLMD's private school teaching residencies in the Upper East Side of Manhattan and Downtown Brooklyn. My role as *participant-observer* means that I was actively engaging in the classroom activities as a teaching assistant while also operating with a researcher's mindset to take notes and gain information related to this project.

Both teaching residences were at predominately white, tuition-based private schools. The racial, cultural, and socioeconomic demographics of each school, which will all be shared, speak to the necessity of multicultural education in predominately white spaces as a means of challenging practices of marginalization. While students of color need to be affirmed and uplifted whether in a predominately white *or* predominantly of color space, these cases studies

show tangible examples of how students of color get swallowed in white school culture and *need* to be prioritized. Multicultural dance education, therefore, serves not only to uplift the marginalized but to *challenge the whiteness*, which contributes to goals of social justice pedagogy.

SLMD's Brearley School residency on the Upper East Side is where I spent the most amount of time. This is a K-12, private, all-girls school founded in 1884. There are 720 students enrolled. Tuition is \$47,650 a year, and only 20% of students receive financial aid ("At a Glance"). 50% of Brearley girls identify as students of color, although the classes feel overwhelmingly white with only 3-6 students of color in the several classes of 20-25 students I observed.

SLMD has had a teaching residency at Brearley since 2011. The company partners with the school's dance teacher to offer 1-hour cultural dance classes twice a week as a part of their physical education curricula. This year, SLMD was working with the eighth graders for the spring term. There are three eighth grade classes at Brearley, and SLMD worked with each of them for four weeks at a time, rotating to a new eighth grade class at the end of each four-week interval.

I had the opportunity to observe two of the three eighth grade class rotations. I was a teaching assistant in the hour-long classes twice a week for approximately eight weeks. The first eighth grade class I observed was unique because they would have an evening performance to share the work at the end of their four weeks of class. The Brearley dance department was having a mid-semester showcase of work from all the dance classes and dance teams in the school. Including dress rehearsals and performance dates for that show, I had approximately 20 hours of fieldwork with the students total. For the purposes of this paper, I will only talk about the first

eighth grade class because, given the performance, I spent the most amount of time with them, and their class produced a lot of content that is most relevant to this work.

The class was composed of about 25 girls. The majority of students were white with only five or six students of color in the class. The multicultural focal point for the class was Afro-Haitian dance. Given that this was a majority white space, most, if not all, the students were learning about a culture that was different from their own. This classroom dynamic made kinesthetic empathy an important key term for this fieldwork site. During my time there, I was heavily focusing on how the white students engaged with the history of the dances and how they embodied the movement. For the most part, the white students were actively listening and trying to learn and successfully execute the movements.

The eighth graders learned a Haitian dance called “*patwa*” which was created to honor and celebrate the triumphs of the historic Haitian Revolution. Before starting the movement, the students had a discussion about the historical context of the dance. “Who has ever heard of the Haitian Revolution before?” the teacher asked. The girls became very excited. “Ooo! Oooo! We are learning about that in history class right now!” Their excitement about having already been introduced to the concept made me smile. This is a real-life example of how dance education can be used to expand and deepen knowledge of what is being taught in the core academic classes. The dance teacher did not know that they were learning about this at the exact same time; it just so happened to align perfectly. But even if students learn about a culture or a history in a dance class first and their academic class later in the year, or vice versa, there is still the usefulness of reinforcing material through two different mediums and perhaps expanding knowledge and filling in gaps. Juliet McMains strives for this kind of multidisciplinary structure in her dance technique classes. She requires her students to read and write about the “sociocultural and

historical context of the dance forms they are studying.” The academic research paired with the physical dance technique classes makes for not only a deeper understanding but a deeper appreciation for the dance forms (McMains 27).

Based on what was brought up about the Haitian Revolution, the teacher prompted the students to brainstorm what characteristics and themes the *patwa* dance was meant to represent. The girls began shouting out wonderful answers: “Resistance... leadership... human rights...” After a few more answers, the teacher asked them if they could apply these themes of the Haitian Revolution to their current-day lives. They begin talking about fighting for racial and social equality in our country today with the same qualities of “leadership” and “resistance” that fueled the Haitian Revolution. One student brought up combating President Donald Trump’s xenophobic immigration policies. This classroom discussion provides an example of how a cultural dance form brought forth practices of critical cultural consciousness and social justice in the classroom. What was valuable about this moment was that the teacher was not force feeding these ideas to the students; she asked guiding questions, but the students were responsible for thinking critically and brainstorming the answers on their own. This ties into collective responsibility - students taking ownership of the topic at hand and *engaging* with the material not just receiving it. Furthermore, it serves as an example of social justice pedagogy because students are invited to brainstorm ways of bringing the radical change exemplified in the history of this dance into the societal issues they face in their community today. In “Moving Social Justice,” Risner and Stinson talk about that merging of dance education and social action, “Teaching specific dance contents should be based on the assumption that students and teachers are co-creators of dance and of the world... So, by dancing and in dancing we should be able to *make a difference* (emphasis mine) in the society we live in. By sharing and experiencing bodily

possibilities of construction and transformation in dance classes we can also feel empowered to interact with people in different ways” (Risner and Stinson 15).

Once the students had an introduction to the historical context of the dance, they began learning the introductory steps for their performance. Even while learning movement they were still learning historical context. Their teacher would inform them, “This movement resembles the fighting stances that the enslaved Haitians would take during battles... This part of the dance is meant to honor a specific warrior and leader of the Haitian Revolution.” Cultural knowledge flowed through their minds and their bodies. Now, they were absorbing the stories of the Revolution by embodying the stances and movements of the enslaved Haitians. Many of the movements represented fight and defense stances such as blocking one’s face or throwing a punch. Students could have opportunities for kinesthetic empathy in these moments. Further discussion could have been had to see how the students conceptualized the Revolution after embodying the movements. Questions that I would have asked the students, if it were my own class or if given the time and space to do so at Brearley, were *What do these movements tell you about what the enslaved Afro-Haitians went through during the Revolution? How do you think the warriors and revolutionaries felt? How would you feel if these movements weren’t a dance but your training for a fight?* These questions would again invite students to think of multicultural dance education as more than just movement; they would be learning about and empathizing with a culture through that movement.

As the weeks passed, I helped the teacher and the students as they set the material and formations for their performance showcase. Every now and then, the teacher would ask the students to remind her what the dance was about and why it was performed to solidify the context and make sure that it was still being honored in the children’s minds. This was important

to me because it shows that she, as an educator, was prioritizing the context just as much as the movement and wanted the students to do the same. Come the week of the performance, the students shifted into dress and tech rehearsal mode. They tried on costumes and set places on stage during our class time. For the performance, each student was provided a lapa, a traditional African dance skirt, and a head scarf to match. This was yet another opportunity for multicultural dance education to extend beyond movement. The students now had a tangible understanding of traditional clothing of a culture other than their own.

The performance went well. As mentioned above, my observations were heavily focused on how the white students engaged with the material, and there was great effort from each of them, both in class and during the performance. I could tell that there was engagement through small efforts like students asking questions during instructional time to clarify movements, students practicing the sequences with their classmates during breaks, and the class showing their excitement and eagerness to get on stage on the night of the performance. While I, unfortunately, do not get to follow these students through the remainder of their academic journeys or have other multicultural dance experiences with them, I hope that the cultural exposure in these short four weeks can be carried into many other areas of their lives, making them more culturally aware and empathetic beings who advocate for social change.

### **Fieldwork Site Three: Participant-Observations with SLMD Teaching Residency at the Brooklyn Friends School**

The second residency site I observed with SLMD is at another private, K-12 institution called the Brooklyn Friends School (BFS). It was founded in 1867, has a student body of 917, costs \$43,000 a year, and gives financial assistance to 33% of its families (“Quick Facts about Brooklyn Friends School”). Unlike Brearley, BFS is a co-educational school, but the class that I



observed was all girls. It was an Upper (high) School group of twelve 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students that have class with SLMD twice a week as a self-selected hour and a half dance elective. Three quarters of the class was white with only four out of the twelve girls identifying as students of color: three Black students and one Latina student. This racial composition, according to my observations, seems to be highly representative of the greater student body at BFS as well, but the school's website statistics claim that nearly 40% of its students are of color. Regardless, BFS is undeniably a predominately white school, and therefore, in observing the concepts of multicultural dance education in this space of learning, race, even more so than culture, was a central lens.

This dance class has been intentionally developed with a multicultural curriculum. The girls have rotating cultural dance units such as West African Dance and Dance Hall, a Jamaican and Reggae-based dance style. During my time observing, however, rather than working on a specific cultural dance style, they were learning and setting an excerpt from SLMD company repertory, which I will explain in more detail later, for a school performance.

Sydney Mosley, founder and artistic director of SLMD, teaches this class at BFS and begins every class in a powerful way. The opening activity is called "I See You." Since it precedes the warm-up, it is the very first practice that welcomes the students into the space. Students are invited to stand in a circle and must make eye contact with each person in the circle one by one. As each student makes eye contact with someone else in the circle, she and that other person walk slowly into the middle of the circle, maintaining steady eye contact. Once the pair meets in the center of the circle, they continue to walk forward switching spots with each other by taking the place of their partner in the circle. This process continues until everyone in the circle has made one-on-one eye contact and switched places with each other. This could be

paralleled to the Concentration Clap Out that I had my students do in my volunteer teaching. In each activity students are encouraged to concentrate, make eye contact, and work together to complete an end goal.

In my first class with the students, Sydnie asked the girls to explain to me why they start each class with this exercise. A few girls took turns chiming in. “We take this time to see each other because we see each other throughout the whole day but we don’t *see* each other” ... “This is a way for us to connect with each other and acknowledge who’s in the space before we start working together” ... “We have to build a connection with each other before we dance.” The intentions behind “I See You” can be compared to the mirroring exercises that were conducted in my teaching with Movement Exchange. It is all about respecting and caring for others in the classroom simply by acknowledging their presence. Again, the inspiration of this work is to prioritize and uplift marginalized students. Activities like “I See You” and mirroring are foundations for helping students who are usually ignored and forgotten feel like heard and supported members of the group. As Adrienne Sansom explains, an educational space is “healing” when “the child/learner is seen as a whole person” (Sansom 141).

While the “I See You” exercise may have been pushing the students of this one BFS dance class in the right direction towards social equality, the overall Upper School climate at BFS seemed to be going in the complete *opposite* direction. One Wednesday, as I approached the doors of BFS, I was stopped in my tracks by an event that drastically change the course of the fieldwork observations. The students had completely blocked the entrance to the school with their bodies and were protesting repeated acts of racism on their school campus. Classes were canceled, school security was on high alert, and teachers and administrators looked on in tense suspense waiting to see how the students were going to mobilize next. It was surprising and

almost entrancing for me to see the students protesting – surprising to see young students, many only 14 and 15, mobilizing for social justice with a radical, well-planned movement and entrancing because I had so many questions and wanted to make sure I did not miss a beat. As things unfolded, I realized that this highly unexpected event was creating a very rich example of using multicultural dance education as a medium for many of our key terms. The BFS teaching residency became a space for me to observe how teachers must actively engage with their students and with the curriculum to make the classroom a space that advocates for social safety and equality based on the needs of students of color.

In order to gain some clarity around what was going on. I was lead upstairs by the two dance teachers that I was working with – Jesse, the permanent BFS dance faculty and Sydnie, the SLMD teaching resident. Jesse was providing the updates as the one who had seen the tensions unfold the most intimately as a full-time teacher. She informed us that there had been incidents of white students practicing colorism, telling racist jokes, and using the “n” word. The students of color were tired of being oppressed in their school environment and having teachers and administrators not take action. Jesse explained her guilt in not being supportive enough for her students of color. She talked about the racial tension that was prevalent in our single dance class alone in the past few weeks and how that reflected the general school culture. She informed us that in class one day, earlier that week, one of our Black students bluntly declared, “I’m tired of all the white girls in my class.” After relaying this statement to us, Jesse then exclaimed, “And she’s not wrong! I agree with her!” Jesse was very emotional about the situation. It was difficult for her to share with us and she was becoming teary eyed. It pained me to see her grieving for her students and feeling like she had not done enough. But I was also glad to hear that she

wanted to do more and intended to reflect intentionally on what actions she was going to take to support her students of color immediately.

After Jesse gave Sydney and me the updates, we began discussing what comes next as the students would have a school dance performance just one week after the protest. How were we realistically going to ask these students to work and rehearse together to produce a show when there was tension, frustration, and pain that needed to be addressed? This was not a small playground quarrel. This was the marginalization and oppression of students of color. It could not be fixed in a day, and it could not be brushed under the rug. It needed to be prioritized.

This moment with Jesse, Sydney, and I showed the vulnerability that teaching multicultural dance education requires. As an educator, one will *never* have all the answers. There will be moments of failure and conflict and difficulty. We would see with this situation that, in these moments of difficulty, it is the educator's responsibility to make the students the center of everything. Working towards a resolution would involve using the theories and practices of culturally relevant pedagogy to assess what was useful for the students of color in this difficult moment, and also critical cultural consciousness to analyze the happenings in the school and how we could work as a group to change what we could.

The first step, we decided, in figuring out how to best serve the students was to continue to support them in their protest that day in order to better understand what they were going through and how we could be allies and a support system for them. The students had moved from barricading the school entrance to an upstairs common space where they held a Student of Color speak-out. We headed to the speak out to listen to their narratives. This was the most powerful part of the experience.

For approximately an hour I was able to listen to the thoughts and frustrations of these teenagers of color. I heard over 20 student voices during my time observing the speak out. There were a few white student allies, but not many, who sat in the space with the students of color and also shared their perspectives. The students were calling for so many important changes in their school community and school culture. They wanted teachers and administrators to stop turning a blind eye to bullying and racism and microaggressions in their classrooms. They wanted fellow students of color to actually build the “community” that they constantly speak about and be true allies and support for one another against racism on the campus. They wanted white students to stop acting like the “victims” when they, as students of color, were victimized, marginalized, and oppressed every single day in school and out of school.

One of the bigger issues seemed to be that there were conflicting views on *how* combating racism in the school community should be handled which created tension amongst the students of color themselves. One Black student said that she wanted the male students of color at BFS to be more aggressive advocates for social change. She exclaimed, “These middle school boys look up to you! I literally heard one of the middle school boys say I want to be like Jason (pseudonym) [high school student basketball player] when I grow up!” She wanted the males of color on campus to stop ignoring and enforcing incidents of racism and colorism on the campus. “I heard one of you say ‘I *only* like my girls like Zendaya’. That’s wrong! That’s colorist. That tells darker skinned girls on this campus that they are ugly and that they don’t matter to you.” Another Black student explained that he understood “calling people out for their shit” but that they needed to do so in much more “loving” and “respectful” ways than what was occurring on campus. He explained that the anger “wasn’t the way to bring change.” Divides such as these

among the students of color themselves made the protests and the racial tensions even more complex.

Following the speak out, there were two more days of student protest. One day was deemed a “Day of Silence” and another was a day for Students of Color Affinity groups. Both days ended in overwhelming frustration for the students. The Day of Silence participators were indicated by wearing arm bands. There were white ally students who wore the arm bands but then continued to talk and laugh with friends throughout the entire day. Students of color felt disrespected and enraged. The Students of Color Affinity groups were meant to be a safe space for students to express their frustrations and calls to action; however, it became a screaming match amongst the varying opinions of students of color on how to mobilize against the school racism.

After hearing the various perspectives at the speak out, and hearing of the emotional days that followed, Sydnie and Jesse thought that a space of release and healing would be the best place to start for the first dance class after the protests. As mentioned before, Sansom discusses the power of the dance classroom as a healing space. She states, “The idea of learning as healing, or the teacher as a healer is equally relevant when addressing the intentions of curriculum where the child/learner is seen as a whole person and central to the learning and teaching process... when learning is viewed in an interconnected manner and linked to the learner’s lived experiences, there is a form of presence or authenticity, which is meaningful, engaging, and thus self-actualizing” (Sansom 141). What we wanted, more than anything, was for our students of color to know that they were respected and valued in our class because now more than ever they felt the complete opposite in the midst of the general school culture. It was also time for social justice pedagogy in the classroom. How could we create positive social change in our dance class

that would hopefully spill over into the general school climate and even further outside the school community? And then there was the idea of emancipatory education as well. How do we make the classroom a space where students of color feel the freedom to be themselves, to be safe from racial oppression, to openly and honestly communicate their feelings and wants and needs?

Sydney and Jesse decided to facilitate a classroom affinity group session for the first class directly following the protests. We broke up into two affinity groups: Jesse took the white students into another classroom, and Sydney and I stayed with the students of color. Each space was meant to be open and safe for the students to discuss how they were feeling about the school happenings and how they wanted to move forward given the circumstances. The agenda therefore embodied the goals of emancipatory education and social justice pedagogy mentioned above: giving the students of color a safe space of releasing their thoughts and feelings and beginning to heal from the situation paired with brainstorming tangible objectives for creating their own forms of social change in BFS after the results of the protests.

The white students, as shared afterwards by Jesse, wanted a sense of unity and normality to be restored on the campus. The students of color wanted devoted allyship from their teachers and peers. They wanted an end to “fake genuine” support. An example they gave of this was the incident in which white students who wore bracelets for the Day of Silence but still spoke and laughed with their friends. Another example was how their class deans emailed the parents of students of color to say they were “looking out” for them but then didn’t even speak to the students of color when they would pass each other during the school day.

The time set aside simply for talking through the situation was important for clarity of student perspectives and for verbally discussing a plan for how dance and creative expression would fit into this narrative. With the affinity groups, we were acknowledging that student voices

mattered and would be prioritized even above the coming dance show in this moment. Scholar Judith Lynne Hanna criticizes teachers for not allowing enough space for student perspectives, “Children’s voices must be heard in order best to help them. When advertisers wish to sell a product, they investigate targeted consumers and elicit their views. Rarely do educators elicit children’s perceptions about their social worlds, their peer-groups priorities and pressures, their family and community life” (77). After processing and communicating vocally, we moved into developing steps for altering the dance showcase choreography in ways that would help the students heal from the racism and protests and mobilize for social change within the school.

The students had the opportunity to mold the SLMD repertory to communicate what was culturally relevant to them in that moment. The repertory, called *Sleeping Beauty*, was choreographed to express a theme of “dreaming” and hoping for financial success as a professional dancer but having a disappointing reality of financial instability placed before you instead. Sydnie shared with the students that this narrative, while meaning something different when performed by her company, could be translated to express how they were feeling about what the school climate *should* feel like and what it actually felt like in that moment. The students developed their own choreography to reflect this narrative and to coincide with the movements of the dance they had already learned for the performance. They also altered the music to include voiceovers of how the school’s mission of equality and diversity was failing them. The student choreography would be representative not only of current feelings, but how the students wanted things to change moving forward. One of the students of color was excited for this explaining, “Snippets of movement to represent how we are feeling instead of saying words is good sometimes because that’s easier.”



Due to unfortunate scheduling conflicts, I was unable to attend the performance and witness the final product of the student's social justice choreography. However, I did witness that the process leading up to that performance was powerful in helping the students take social action when they felt hopeless due to the school's recent events. Dance was the tool that gave students freedom to creatively express their feelings and envision the social justice they wanted to bring to their community. Sansom's description of using dance to uplift marginalized students parallels with the experiences of the BFS students. She explains that dance provides the "drive" and "an incessant need to seek new possibilities for the future brought about by critical and imaginative thinking" (Sansom 142-144). This is what happened at BFS by allowing the students to take ownership of the performance making it culturally relevant and social just work.

I would ideally wish to also focus on the white student perspective in this field site; however, I did not gain the opportunity to have as many discussions with them in the time following the protest. I do hope, however, that the space to vocalize and creatively conceptualize the protest gave them space to consider the student of color perspective and how they could become better allies and advocates for social change in their school. It would have been powerful, I believe, to witness an affinity group with *all* of our students in one space so that all perspectives could be openly shared. Dance perhaps could have been used in this moment, either paired with speaking or in place of it, by having white students mirror students of color as they interpreted their feelings and perspectives through movements and then conducting the reverse for white students to express their feelings to the students of color. Tensions could be worked through in the space with kinesthetic empathy as a guide.

Admittedly, this fieldwork site saddened me because I know that the issues of oppression that students of color feel at BFS will not be eradicated in a short period of time and many of the

student protestors may never see the justice they wish to see in their school environment while they are there. However, I am happy that the multicultural dance class served as a safe space for both students of color and white students to openly express themselves and to use creative movement to envision and share the social change they were advocating for at BFS.

#### **Fieldwork Site Four: Observations at Ifetayo Cultural Arts Academy**

Ifetayo, mentioned earlier in this project, is a weekend cultural school of the arts based in Brooklyn, NY founded by Kwayera Archer-Cunningham. The academy offers free and tuition-based classes to children of all ages, and also has a student, pre-professional dance company. All of Ifetayo's curriculum and classes are centered on African-based histories and cultural practices. This distinction in and of itself shows support, uplift, and prioritization of the marginalized.

From my first moments stepping into Ifetayo, I felt the strongest, most vibrant community vibe I had felt in a while. I could tell before even engaging with members of the Ifetayo community that this was a family in the way that everyone flowed together even if participating in different tasks; while somewhat difficult to describe in words, there was a feeling of unity in the space even just by observing.

The hustle and bustle of students changing clothes, switching classes, grabbing lunch, and preparing for a field trip later that day brought a very high energy to the place that I expected to make me overwhelmed and anxious, but after some observation, actually ended up seeming more like organized chaos, appropriate for the scene. Mothers helped their small daughters out of their lapas, traditional African dance skirts, following their classes. Middle school boys carried drums down the hallway in preparation for their percussion class. A lunch of vegetable pasta and salad was being served to all who wanted it. Several teachers, administrators, and accompanists

walked around in bright yellow shirts with the Ifetayo logo on them attending to business and directing children. Everyone was interacting with someone. No one was alone. Parents chatted and laughed as they waited for their children to change or be finished with class. Administrators looked over forms and schedules together. Teachers helped little ones lace their shoes or tie their lapas. Other teachers reprimanded their students for not cleaning up after themselves. The buzz of these interactions was what fed that strong community vibe. It was an observation that excited me being that one of the principles of this project is community building. I could feel that Ifetayo would be a strong example of it.

The personalized welcome that was so generously gifted to me also showed community in a beautiful way. “This is Sister Armoni!” The Executive Artistic Director of Ifetayo, Dr. Angela Fatou Gittens, would enthusiastically introduce me at least five times in my short visit. Everyone was “Sister...” and “Brother...” at Ifetayo, even the EAD herself who holds a doctorate degree title. It admittedly took me a few tries to stop calling her “Dr. Fatou” and mentally shift to “Sister Fatou” instead. This simple choice of title alone says so much about the communal, familial intention-setting at Ifetayo.

Upon my arriving, Sister Fatou was busy organizing for the field trip that evening; so, she asked me to wait in what they call the “Imagination Station.” This is where parents wait for their children, where children take breaks in between classes, and where all can eat, socialize, and participate in creative activities such as coloring and solving puzzles. This was productive waiting time because I was able to play some games with a few of the boys and see parent and student interactions to better set the scene. Unlike my work with SLMD, I was *not* participating in activities at Ifetayo; I was simply observing. With SLMD, I was *invited* to take part in classes as a teaching assistant. In this space, I did not ask for such access; I simply wanted to focus on

my role as an observer only. This was partly because I knew that I would not be consistently coming to Ifetayo as I did while assisting classes with SLMD twice a week; it would be unfair for me to participate as a teaching assistant for only a moment and then disappear rather than actually develop a relationship with the community as I did with SLMD.

Once Sister Fatou was free, she gave me a walking tour of Ifetayo to “officially” start my visit. I will chronologically share the happenings of this tour while simultaneously addressing how my conversations and observations at Ifetayo correspond with the key terms and goals of this project. I was first guided to see each of the classrooms and community rooms of the space. Next, I was given the opportunity to have conversations with three Ifetayo board members, two of which were also parents of Ifetayo students. Lastly, I was able to observe two of their multicultural arts classes.

Each classroom was named after a different African country and had the classroom’s name and purpose on a sign outside of the door along with a map of where the classroom’s country was located. This small, yet purposeful detail was already reflecting the African-based educational experiences that Ifetayo promotes. There were also large posters and drawings along the walls of Caribbean, African, and African American choreographers and dancers along with their names and small biographies. These details were far more than decorations. They provide information and images that were culturally relevant to the students. The predominately Black student body at Ifetayo would receive subtle moments of inspiration and aspiration as they walked along the halls of their school and saw successful artists with brown skin like theirs.

After taking the short walk around, I was introduced to the first board member that I would have the pleasure of speaking with, the Community Engagement Liaison, Sister Marilyn. She talked to me about Ifetayo’s mission to combine cultural knowledge with social justice

which was obviously the perfect conversation for this project. She explained to me how every student that takes dance or art classes at Ifetayo is required to take their free African-centered cultural history classes offered each Saturday. The course is called the “Marcus Garvey Cultural Heritage Program” and is taught to 6-18 year old students by a CUNY college professor. I had the opportunity to meet that professor during my visit as well and hear more about the program. The Marcus Garvey Cultural Heritage curriculum starts from the kingdoms and empires of ancient African civilization and moves throughout precolonial and postcolonial African history. Then, the curriculum covers various points of the African Diaspora throughout Caribbean, Latin American, and North American history. Students are able to get a more in-depth understanding of their African history than they would in a standard public-school history course. Furthermore, they are introduced to narratives that vary from Eurocentric versions of history giving them the context to think critically about the knowledge they receive in their weekly academic schooling versus this extracurricular cultural arts schooling. Sister Marilyn explained to me, “Having the cultural history, the foundation, the knowledge of your own cultural heritage is a necessity in forming social activists.”

My next conversation was with two parents who both serve on the board of Ifetayo in addition to also both having two children who are enrolled in Ifetayo programs. The first mother, with children ages 12 and 14, serves as a chair of Ifetayo’s parent-teacher alliance. Her job as a liaison between faculty, staff, and parents is to oversee each of the four alliance committees that, in her opinion, “truly keep Ifetayo up and running.” She generously gave me a detailed explanation of each group and their responsibilities. One committee, for example, is called “Café Ifetayo” and is responsible for organizing and providing food for the community every weekend. Some students are on campus all day because they take morning *and* afternoon classes with quite

lengthy breaks in between. Having nourishment for students and parents throughout the day is, therefore, a priority for the organization. They also pride themselves on using local caterers and chefs that have connections to the Ifetayo community (family members, friends, etc.).

Another parent-teacher liaison committee is responsible for planning community events outside of regular weekly classes. The chair of the alliance was excited to share with me the initiatives they had underway. One was taking the students to see a touring African dance company performance. Another was complimentary tickets for all Ifetayo parents and students to see the premier of *Black Panther*, a Marvel Comics superhero movie set in a fictional, technologically advanced, East African country. Yet another upcoming event was having a community bonding during President's week, the winter break of Ifetayo's students who attend NYC public schools. It was exciting to hear about their community outreach committee and how intentional they are with bringing everyone together in affordable, fun, and impactful ways! Clearly, even the community initiatives outside of the culturally-based curriculum, like the dance show and the movie screening, are intended to focus on cultural awareness and appreciation with the students as well. It is, again, about providing students of color with uplifting images of their culture to help form *positive self-identities* as Duncan-Andrade describes (635).

Sister Marilyn also contributed to my understanding of how Ifetayo was exceptionally intentional about bringing parents into the community experience. The second Saturday of every month, teachers and parents have a meeting to discuss curriculum, current events, upcoming performances and more. Additionally, there are frequent panels and seminars where Ifetayo brings in various academics, activists, and educators for parents and community members to learn from and engage with. Sister Marilyn informed me that they were currently on a four-week series on the Black female body and having agency over black bodies in our society. They were

also excitedly preparing to host a professor to discuss the history and importance of drumming in African and African-diasporic cultures. Ifetayo is giving endless opportunities for not only children but adults as well to gain cultural awareness and cultural appreciation as well as sociocultural consciousness.

The emphasis on community and cultural immersion outside of Ifetayo's arts classes is important for this project because it provides tangible examples of how multicultural dance education provided the inspiration for communal growth and strength. It is because of the communal principles and foundations of the African-based arts traditions that Kwayera Archer-Cunningham started Ifetayo: "The high value placed on unity within the family... is shared by individuals throughout the Diaspora. In addition, communities of African descent have always viewed the arts as integral to the spiritual, psychological, emotional, educational, and recreational dimensions of their lives. As a result, the arts and cultural learning serve as the foundation for the Ifetayo approach to developing communities" (Archer-Cunningham 26). Multicultural arts education brought the people of Ifetayo together, and a community, that continually uplifts these students of color inside and outside the classroom, was manifested and mobilized as a result.

The Parent-Teacher Alliance chair and her two daughters have been with Ifetayo for nine years. She first enrolled when her daughters were 3 and 5 years old. The Ifetayo experience has given her children a "balance" between what they learn in school (more eurocentric) and what they learn about *themselves* (more ethnocentric). She explained how Ifetayo grounds her girls in their cultural heritage when they do not always have access to it in their schools and communities.

The second mother I chatted with is also on Ifetayo's executive board. She and the Parent-Teacher Alliance chair had actually joined the Ifetayo community the same season nine years ago. Her children are 12 and 13. She had similar sentiments about Ifetayo giving her children a balance; they attend a predominately white private school, and she worried about them getting swallowed up in that culture. The mother also shared with me a story of her children going to a predominately white dance school before they found Ifetayo. "It just wasn't going to work," she explained. They needed something that reflected their culture. Having conversations with these parents gave me a valuable glance into the types of decisions parents of color have to make when raising their children. Both of the parents, in one form or another, mentioned this idea of balancing between white and minority culture. They want their children to have exposure to dominant culture and dominant resources, for example, the mother choosing this predominately white private school for her children. However, they do not want their children to lose their heritage or *pride* in who they are culturally and socially. These parents look to Ifetayo to provide that culturally relevant education their children need.

Moving along in my tour, I had the opportunity to observe a few of Ifetayo's cultural arts classes. The first was a middle school beginner African dance class. It was an intimate class; there were only six girls, and only one or two were missing that day, I believe. I could tell from the very beginning that expectations were high for the girls. They had to run laps for being late to class. They had to start sections of the warm-up over if they didn't execute the movements fully. And the choreography that they were learning seemed, to me, more "advanced" than "beginner" content. This showed me that Ifetayo fulfilled purposes beyond just cultural awareness but also setting standards of excellence, discipline, and high expectations for their students.



Halfway through the class Sister Fatou, the Executive Artistic Director, came into the class and asked the teacher if they could pause for a moment to chat with me about their class. She asked them some guiding questions and they reported the answers to me. The girls were learning a dance called *cocoba*, an African dance of agriculture. While gesturing some of the dance movements, the girls would describe for me their meanings or purposes in the dance such as plowing a certain vegetable root or celebrating harvests and crops. I really appreciated Sister Fatou taking the time to have them share. Not only did it help me better understand the context of the choreography as I observed, but it also affirmed that Ifetayo uses the arts classes to culturally educate their students just as much as the Marcus Garvey history classes. The students had been working on this dance for a couple weeks and had clearly internalized the historical and cultural background along with the movements, and they were able to clearly articulate that for me.

The next class I observed was a drumming class. Ifetayo offers Djembe and Conga drumming classes. Sister Fatou explained to me that both boys and girls take these classes and that they pride themselves on having master female drumming teachers. Even gender equality is a priority in this space. The drumming class I observed was composed of about seven students and a teacher. Every student had a beautiful drum with the Ifetayo logo carved into the wooden base. During my time observing the class, the students were being reminded of the sacredness of drumming and how integral it is to the African cultural, communal, and spiritual experiences. This moment proved that, yet again, through the arts, the school was manifesting a deeper understanding of cultural heritage for these students of color.

There are so many programs at Ifetayo that I did not have time to see. They offer Capoeira, hip hop, modern, theater, “health and well-being” classes like Pilates and yoga,

financial education workshops, and “Rites of Passage” youth mentoring programs. Nevertheless, simply *knowing* about all of these programs proved even further that Ifetayo is a beautiful organization that prioritizes and uplifts students of color *and* their surrounding community. Blooming from the framework of social just multicultural dance education came a thriving communal and cultural hub.

### **BUILDING THE FUTURE: Concluding Thoughts and Appendix of Sample Lesson Plans**

This project is meant to serve as an introduction to putting the theory of socially-just multicultural dance education into effective practice. I have defended the relevance and importance of this work by describing the increased levels of racial and cultural diversity in our country, the growing academic achievement gap and sociocultural deficit between white students and students of color, and the persistent practices of racism and eurocentrism in the academic and social climates of American schools. I have carefully chosen and defined a set of key pedagogical terms, with multicultural dance education and social justice pedagogy at the forefront, and analyzed how these terms fuse together to achieve the goal of uplifting students of color and building culturally empathetic and supportive communities. Lastly, I have displayed the relevant findings of four fieldwork sites that use socially just multicultural dance education and have evaluated the successes and challenges behind putting the key pedagogical terms into practice. My final contribution to this project – for now – will be providing a set of two sample multicultural dance lesson plans along with carefully constructed descriptions of how the specific lessons can serve students of color and diverse communities. I hope for the lesson plans to be a starting point or a place of inspiration for educators to pursue this form of social justice

pedagogy in their own school communities, adapting the lessons to dance contexts that are culturally relevant for the students they serve.

There are still many questions and challenges that come with the work such as addressing diversity *within* diversity (i.e. not all Black students have the same cultural background), fighting against the deprioritization and defunding of arts education in public schools, and addressing cultural trivialization and appropriation in educational spaces (Hanna 66-69). While these issues do serve as obstacles and should continue to be grappled with, I believe that multicultural dance education still has the power to show students of color their beauty, value, and importance in society as well as encourage communities to mobilize towards a socioculturally just and equitable world that gives those students of color the space to thrive and shine.

## APPENDIX: Sample Lesson Plans

*Each of the two lesson plans below provides five components: a simulated classroom demographic, a theme for the lesson, focus skills for the class, learning objectives for the class, and step-by-step dance activities. At the end of each activity there is a “Debrief” section that quickly explains why the activity is chosen and how it connects to the theme, objectives, and focus skills.*

### Sample Lesson One

**Demographics:** This lesson plan is designed for 8<sup>th</sup> grade (13-14 year old) students at a public, lower-middle class middle school comprised of majority students of color. The academic curriculum is very narrow and exclusive because teachers must prepare students for high-stakes, standardized testing each year. Because of the rigidity of the curriculum, the students of color do not have many opportunities to see images of themselves and their cultures reflected in what they learn, and they wish that they could talk about happenings in their personal lives and communities.

The lesson plan is designed for an hour-and-fifteen-minute class and a class size of approximately 20 to 25 students. It can be altered based on what is most productive for the class time and size at hand. The content represents an introductory lesson to what can and should evolve into an entire unit or section of the curriculum. Lesson plans should be differentiated based on the personal, social, and cultural wants and needs of the students being served.

**Theme:** *Introduction to Afro-Cuban Dance*

Note: Extensive knowledge of Afro-Cuban dance is a prerequisite to teaching this class as to respect and honor the culture. However, the structure, focus skills, activities, etc. of this Afro-Cuban dance lesson can be adapted to serve many other cultural dance forms and is therefore provided to serve as a framework for and inspiration to all.

**Focus Skills:**

- *Cultural awareness and understanding*: gaining knowledge and respect for cultures other than your own
- *Critical cultural consciousness*: analyzing how the dance and culture of the lesson at hand fit into larger scale contexts such as racism, inequality, globalization, etc.
- *Social justice learning*: brainstorming how the cultural dance at hand can be used to inspire positive change in one's school, community, country, or beyond

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students display basic knowledge of the history of Afro-Cuban people and culture and their place in the African Diaspora
- Students display knowledge of the foundations of Afro-Cuban dance including the meaning of orishas (Afro-Cuban deities), drumming, and basic movements
- Students understand the qualities and histories behind selected orishas (for this lesson Ogun and Shango\*) and the dance movements associated with each orisha
- Students reflect on where the qualities/characteristics of selected orishas are present in their own lives and communities
- Students create action plans of how qualities of Afro-Cuban orishas can be used to make positive change in their communities
- Teacher understands how to adapt future lessons on Afro-Cuban culture to serve the student interest based on their thoughts and experiences shared in introductory class

\*there are many Afro-Cuban orishas, each possessing different qualities, that may be useful to explore depending on the interests and needs of the students being served; For this lesson plan, Shango and Ogun were chosen because the following characteristics that they possess were thought to be helpful in uplifting and empowering the students being served:

- **Shango** – orisha of leadership, powerful craftsman, teaches enjoyment of life alongside responsibility and diplomacy
- **Ogun** – warrior orisha, fights for his people against injustice, powerful surgeon and healer, protector

Here are two links that can provide more information on Afro-Cuban orishas in general and the two specific orishas chosen for this lesson

<https://www.jcel-pub.org/latr/article/download/818/793>

<http://santeriachurch.org/the-orishas/ogun/>

**Activity One: Warm Up (5 min.)**

Students and teacher begin in a circle and take three collective breaths together as a class, raising arms with palms of hands up to the ceiling on the inhales and lowering arms with palms of hands to the ground on the exhales. Next, a quick focus game can be facilitated following collective

breaths if necessary to get jittery or scattered students all on one accord; games such as “simon says” or “concentration clapout” (Moody 36). Lastly, initiate a body warm-up by selecting two to three student leader volunteers to lead the class in a quick series of stretches and cardio.

*Debrief: Collective breaths not only invite the group to slow down and focus on the present moment but also bring unity and connection by bringing everyone to one accord. A focus game like “concentration clapout” helps students prepare for team work and cooperation but also paying attention and following instructions. Lastly, the student-lead body warm-up reminds students that all are responsible for learning and teaching in the classroom and provides opportunity to build respect and connections amongst the students themselves.*

### **Activity Two: Creating Cultural Context (20 min.)**

In four small groups, have students conduct their own research on three sections of Afro-Cuban culture based on their own interests out of a set collection of topics (Examples: political history, religion, and family life OR food, economics, and music) using specific websites, paper handouts, or other texts that teacher provides as a guide. Next, invite them to communicate the information learned through a combination of speech and interpretive dancing. Once each of the four groups has presented, give a quick oral overview of some of the more relevant or important parts of the presentations

*Debrief: This activity sparks the cultural awareness and understanding focus skill. Student-driven research is much more engaging than lecture style learning where information is simply deposited from teacher to student. Giving students choices of which aspects of the culture they wish to research also leads to more engagement because they are choosing what interests them. Communication of the information through interpretive dance not only encourages creativity but improves presentation skills and confidence.*

### **Activity Three: Afro-Cuban Basics (10 min.)**

Give students a quick introduction to key terms and movements of Afro-Cuban dance including the definition of orishas, technique behind the various movements, etc. Ask students what information they can provide either from prior knowledge or research that was just conducted. Begin working through the basic movements and inviting students to draw connections to other cultures they already know that may use similar steps and rhythms.

*Debrief: This activity is, again, setting the cultural awareness and understanding framework for students. It also introduces the critical consciousness focus skill by inviting the students to think through more global cultural perspectives as they dance and draw connections to other cultures in the movement.*

#### **Activity Four: Orishas Shango and Ogun (30 min.)**

Give students an introduction to Shango and Ogun based on the definitions and resources listed above; introduction to movements that channel/embody each orisha; following the Shango and Ogun dance session, gather students in a circle to have a recap and discussion about the qualities/characteristics of the two selected orishas and how they can be used in the students' communities to initiate change (Examples: *Ogun is known for fighting against injustice; how can we channel that quality of Ogun in our school or our communities? Shango is known for his leadership; what type of leadership can you embody to better your community?*) Students can then break into small groups to create action plans, in written, oral, dance, or other creative forms, for implementing the possibilities they brainstormed.

*Debrief: The students are now invited to practice the social justice focus skill by applying the cultural knowledge to bring positively change. Learning the dances of the orishas and connecting them to problem solving in their own communities increases leadership and critical thinking skills as well. Lastly, this serves the students by making the curriculum relevant to their lives which, as stated in the demographics section, is not prioritized in their school's curricula.*

#### **Activity Five: Cool Down (10 min.)**

The class can regroup in a circle for the cool down. To recap the lesson, ask each student to share one take away from the day and then pass an Afro-Cuban dance movement of their choice to the person next to them. The student next to them will dance the same movement and share his or her own take away followed by a new Afro-Cuban dance move that gets passed to the next student, and so on and so forth until everyone has shared. Class then ends in at least three collective breath, inhales and exhales.

*Debrief: With the recap, students gain the opportunity to reflect on both the movement knowledge and research knowledge they obtained to help solidify the new cultural*

*understandings. The collective breath invites the class to end in unity as we began in unity and to stay grounded for their next class.*

### Sample Lesson Two

**Demographics:** This lesson plan is designed for 11th grade (16-17 year old) students at a private, predominately white, middle-upper class high school. The students of color at this school feel highly marginalized in the community because the lack of student and teacher diversity gives them very little to relate to in the general culture of the school. The lesson plan is designed for an hour-and-fifteen-minute and a class size of approximately 15 to 20 students. It can be altered based on what is most productive for the class time and size at hand. The content represents an *introductory lesson* to what can and should evolve into an entire unit or section of the curriculum. Lesson plans should be tailored, modified, or revamped based on the personal, social, and cultural wants and needs of the students being served.

**Theme:** *Intercultural Interactions*

#### Focus Skills:

- *Cultural awareness and understanding:* gaining knowledge and respect for cultures other than your own
- *Collaborative learning:* investigating and learning the content as a group; giving students opportunities to teach and learn from each other
- *Team building and collective work:* everyone taking equal responsibility for the lesson and objectives of the class
- *Critical consciousness:* analyzing how the dances and cultures learned about fit into larger scale contexts such as racism, inequality, globalization, etc.

#### Learning Objectives:

- Students of color develop the ability to be leaders and teachers as they share their personal cultural dance backgrounds with their classmates
- All students display knowledge of the cultural dance backgrounds of their peers
- All students develop the ability to respect and honor cultures different from their own through dance by engaging with the student-lead dance lessons
- All students use cultural dance to develop intercultural connections with peers by creating intercultural dance group choreographies and conducting research on the histories of the dances to assess connections and overlaps between the cultures being studied



- All students display ability to collaborate creatively with their peers to develop a finished piece of choreography
- All students learn to challenge dominate and eurocentric cultural standards with the gained knowledge and appreciation of marginalized cultures
- Teachers develop deeper understanding of what cultural contexts are important to their students after assessing student-lead dance lessons and intercultural choreography projects
- Teachers learn how to incorporate the students' valued cultural contexts into future lessons

### **Activity One: Warm Up (5 min.)**

Students and teacher begin in a circle and take three collective breaths together as a class, raising arms with palms of hands up to the ceiling on the inhales and lowering arms with palms of hands to the ground on the exhales. Next, a quick focus game can be facilitated following collective breaths if necessary to get jittery or scattered students all on one accord; games such as “concentration clapout” (Moody 36). Lastly, initiate a body warm-up by selecting two to three student leader volunteers to lead the class in a quick series of stretches and cardio.

*Debrief: Collective breaths not only invite the group to slow down and focus on the present moment but also bring unity and connection by bringing everyone to one accord. A focus game like “concentration clapout” helps students prepare for team work and cooperation but also paying attention and following instructions. Lastly, the student-lead body warm-up reminds students that all are responsible for learning and teaching in the classroom and provides opportunity to build respect and connections amongst the students themselves.*

### **Activity Two (20 min.)**

Students of color in the class will be the leaders of this lesson/unit. *Self-selected* students of color will choose their favorite dance style from their cultural heritage that they will share with the class. (Note: “self-selected” means that students should volunteer ahead of time to lead; forcing students of color to participate could make them feel more marginalized or “othered” in the space. Students of color should only be selected if they want to showcase and teach their culture. A private conversation can be held between teacher and students of color a few classes before this lesson to determine who would like to share and teach, what boundaries are to be set, who is comfortable with what, etc.) Ask student(s) to prepare the dance’s name, country/culture of origin, and social/cultural/historical context (i.e. when/where/how it is performed). The

student(s) will then teach a segment of the dance style to their classmates. This activity can be extended to one child per day sharing for multiple class periods or simply a one-time sharing exercise based on how many students volunteer.

*Debrief: This activity serves the focus skills “cultural awareness and understanding” and “collaborative learning.” White students are invited to hear and understand the narratives of their marginalized peers who are, as stated in the demographics, feeling excluded. It helps students of color to feel acknowledged and prioritized in the school culture. Furthermore, this activity breaks the teacher-leader/student-follower mold by allowing students to step into leadership/teaching roles in the classroom.*

### **Activity Three: (40 min.)**

Students will then break into 3-4 groups to develop their own choreography that highlights the cultural dances of the students of color in each group and creatively fuses them together (Examples: Merengue and Hip-hop dance fusion OR Salsa and West African dance fusion). The cool down period could be used to showcase each group’s choreography if this is a one-day lesson. However, students can have 3-4 class periods to work on their choreography and have a showcase class period following. Students can use both their peers who shared/taught and online resources such as dance history documents, dance tutorials, or dance videos to help them gain more knowledge and inspiration for their choreography and music.

*Debrief: This activity fosters more collaborative learning as well as team building and collective work. The intercultural dance fusions give students opportunities to see how cultures that seem different can actually be connected in many ways. The fusions also provide creative ways for students to more deeply learn and appreciate the cultures being shared. Finally, students of color are, again, being prioritized and given space to share what dances are culturally and socially important in their worlds.*

### **Activity Four: Cool Down (10 min.)**

The majority of the cool down should be used to have a circle-style discussion on the importance of highlighting the students of color in the class not only for the school community but beyond. This conversation can begin with asking the students of color how it felt to share their cultures, why they volunteered to do so, and what it meant to them. Students should also be

invited to reflect on the process of fusing cultures together and how these experiences reflect greater topics of intercultural cooperation and unity. The class should end with at least three collective breaths, inhales and exhales.

*Debrief: The cool down discussion is important for helping students understand that the purpose of this lesson is to challenge the white/eurocentric standards that dominate their school community culture. It should help students, all students not just white students, reflect on how to be more inclusive and appreciative of those who are “different.” The discussion on intercultural interactions should also bring a sense of empathy and unity to the space as students are challenged against compartmentalizing and “othering” different cultures now that they have not only physically embodied different cultures through dance but have also learned about their histories and overlapping with other cultures.*

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